

US must walk softly with Malaysia

Americans must listen to our views

Comment
by **Lim Kok Wing**

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JUST like every action that we initiate, the recent visit to the United States by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will have its consequences.

The United States needs to strengthen its ties with Malaysia. It can no longer ignore the value of a Malaysian leadership.

Here is a Muslim country, liberal in its ways, sensitive to global trends in both business and politics and it is one of the few that can proudly attest to four decades of progress. It is also amongst the most stable and peaceful nations in the world today.

It is a peace and a stability that has been carefully safeguarded over the years based on a formula of leadership shared among the main races that comprise Malaysia.

The United States can no longer overlook the admiration and respect that Malaysia enjoys within the developing world. The Malaysian voice is able to sway and influence events in many parts of the world, albeit parts that are unimportant to a powerful country like the US.

But these are parts that are beginning to loom in importance especially when the Americans feel the threat to their shores coming from any direction. They have to know who their allies are and what is brewing in the backyard of those that are not so favourable to them.

just needs to be strengthened. More organisations and individuals should come forward to cement this friendship in tangible ways such as through cultural exchanges and more business collaborations.

There is so much value in this US-Malaysia ties that will benefit both countries but it can only be achieved if sincere and concerned players in the two countries move forward to build the relationship.

If the Americans open their minds and their hearts to what Malaysia offers, the Americans will find that Malaysia is the kind of country they will like to be linked with and Mahathir is the kind of leader they will like to support. He is the world's longest serving democratically elected leader since he took tenure as prime minister in 1981.

You could even say that he is the most progressive and very accomplished Muslim leader today.

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He is outspoken and speaks his mind fearlessly. The kind of man Americans portray in many of their well-known movies. The best that comes to mind is the *Mr Smith Goes To Washington* type.

The US has awoken to the fact that there is a world out there hostile to its interference and resentful of its foreign policies.

Mahathir said in Washington recently that at one time America and the American people were the best friends of all the oppressed peoples of the world. It is time now for the United States to review its stance and acknowledge that as the most powerful country in the world it bears a responsibility to tread carefully and not be so quick to judge and to retaliate.

By contrast Malaysia over the years has developed close friendships with countries that are affected by the digital divide that threatens to impoverish their economies and stunt their growth.

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These are countries that have difficulty in making the transition to knowledge-based economic growth. Malaysia understands their struggle. We have lent a hand by providing a bridge in technological advancement. The bridge that Malaysia provides is more realistic to these countries as we are not fully developed and we are past developing status.

The more advanced countries cannot provide the model for these lesser developed countries to emulate. Hence the Malaysian model and the Malaysian experience are both valuable to these countries.

Malaysia mirrors the USA in so many ways. As Mahathir pointed out in his speech in Washington, we both achieved independence from the same colonial power, we share a common history, language, many of our values, goals and even challenges. Why even our flags are quite similar!

Interaction between the two countries should be easy, amicable and more forthcoming. The US is Malaysia's biggest investor and has been so for many years.

A strong foundation is already in place. It

Malaysia is easily amongst the most successful multi-cultural and multi-racial Islamic nations noted for its political stability and economic accomplishments. One of the best contributions Malaysia can offer to Americans right now is a bridge to understanding the Muslim world.

It is a world that is highly complex, widespread and very powerful with many layers to its structure, organisation and influence. But the majority of Muslims are actually ordinary people just like anybody else in the world. And along with the decent, law-abiding people there are the extremists who bring focus to their causes through acts of violence.

To pool all Muslims - the good, the bad and the ugly - under one banner and that too a completely negative one, is to be unfair to the entire community.

The fact that the Pope who presides over a global community of about one billion Catholics has chosen to recognise Mahathir as a prominent Muslim leader and invited him for a dialogue speaks volumes of how the world views him.

The Catholic Church is perhaps the only religious body in existence that is both church and political organisation.

Pope John Paul II, believed to be the 263rd Pontiff, successor of St. Peter as Bishop of Rome, has been described as the only leader whose standing in religion matches the political clout of the American President, strongly considers that Mahathir can help in the Middle-east situation.

Without economic clout, without military strength, without money power Malaysia has grown to represent the developing world. And we have achieved this by doing things through sincerity and through concern for our fellow human beings. The prime minister merely applied his win-win philosophy to win the hearts and minds of those in the Third World. Malaysia brought nothing but its knowledge to help others.

Can you then imagine what a country like the United States can achieve by merely applying the win-win formula and trading with knowledge instead of arms to win friends around the world?