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Bowie-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR, A BEACON OF HOPE, SAYS DR PADDY BOWIE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 7 (Bernama) -- Mainstream America may be prepared to look again at Malaysia dispelling bizarre notions of sirens wailing and jackbooted thugs on every street corner of the country.

"There are no beggars on those same streets and the people smile. This is neither a haven nor a hub for terrorists. It is safer than most places," said writer and political analyst Datuk Dr Paddy Bowie, in her article on the YTLcommunity.com, a website run by YTL e-solutions Bhd, on Monday.

She said this was the most probable reaction of the Americans after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad visited the country and met President George Bush at the White House during the tour last month.

During the visit and the meeting with, not only Bush, but also other leaders of the present United States (US) administration, the Prime Minister was able to clarify the position of Muslims in the world and dispel the notion that not all Muslims were linked to terrorist movements.

In the article, she said Dr Mahathir continues to punch above his weight but where before, people may have heard him but were seldom willing to listen, now they are more receptive.

"We intend to give him a voice in the next issue and especially to many of his more significant pronouncements on the recent trip. It will, if nothing else, give us new insight on a man previously much misunderstood and much maligned," she added.

She said the visit would explore Dr Mahathir's newfound identity and his repositioning as a credible Muslim leader.

Dr Bowie said after years of being derided as an anti-Western demagogue and pilloried as a human rights abuser and for his perceived vitriolic, slogan spouting rhetoric, he is now seen as a valued ally.

"It has not gone unnoticed that even while the smoke was still billowing out of the devastated World Trade Center, one of the first to arrive at the American Embassy in Kuala Lumpur to sign the condolence book had been the country's Prime Minister," she added.

The change of heart on the part of US was best summed up by the American Ambassador to Malaysia, Marie Huhtala, with the perspicacious words that "Dr Mahathir is part of the solution, not part of the problem," said Dr Bowie, who is also a frequent speaker on the conference circuit notably the Economist Conferences and the Pacific Rim Forum.

On Dr Mahathir's meeting with Bush, she said the Malaysian Prime Minister was there foremost as an Islamic leader and one whom the most powerful man in the world wished to consult on how to handle the war on terrorism.

"A temporary euphoria the sceptics will claim. But for once we have a positive story on Malaysia, based on the bedrock fundamentals of our reality.

"Yes, Dr Mahathir is a foremost moderate. The leader of one of the most multi racial, multi cultural, multi religious countries and a role model of a tolerance-based Muslim regime more secular than theocratic and bigoted," said Dr Paddy, who graduated from Oxford University and left United Kingdom for Malaysia 45 years ago.

"The puzzle for most Malaysians is why this recognition is so belated. It was as if Dr Mahathir had suddenly come out of the religious closet as a moderate leader. Yet he has always been such, for all the world to see. It did not need some road to Damascus type revelation to know this," she said.

Dr Bowie said if there was any revelation at all, it was the culture shock for Dr Mahathir's audience at the US-Asean Dinner in Washington when the firebrand Malaysian leader they had come to expect turned out to be a polite, fairly softly spoken gentleman in the Malay tradition of courtesy, wise, good humoured and at times humorous.

Through the main meeting, the many sub-meetings, the closed-door sessions with key members of Congress and the Senate, the media interviews, a serious theme emerged.

"He gave no concession to individual terrorists who must be hunted down and brought to justice," she added.

Here his American hosts were given a glimpse of the vintage Mahathir and of the influence of his medical training and instincts on the political style of this doctor turned politician.

And now the latest development is that the Pope has invited Dr Mahathir to the Vatican.

-- BERNAMA

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