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Not easy to be a leader

Appa

Dear Son,

CERTAINLY a leader is someone on the go. The word `lead' comes from the Old English verb `laeden', which means to cause to go. So a leader is not simply someone who heads some organisation or nation but someone who is on the go.

It follows from this that a person who reacts to events is not a leader. He should not only have vision but the capacity to translate that vision into reality. Most people agree that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad fits the bill. Some of his aides say he is indefatigable. You ask if it is true that he has failed in his attempt to change the Malay mindset. He has said so himself, you say. And, yes, he has wept over it.

First, hardly anyone can succeed in everything he undertakes. Two, success is a matter of interpretation and degree. The fact is, he has done more for the Malays than any other Prime Minister. During his 21 years now, his government has come out with uncountable programmes, strategies and allocations to uplift the Malays.

In many ways, he has been successful. Go to the shopping complexes, visit the beaches, pop into luxury hotels: you will find Malays there. Twenty or thirty years ago, you would have had to strain your eyes to catch a glimpse of a Malay in the larger hotels. Malays own and manage many of the larger corporations today. An increasing number of them live luxurious lifestyles. Malays fill the universities.

If at one time, the word tycoon brought to mind a Chinese businessman, today the word tycoon also brings to mind a Malay entrepreneur.

But Mahathir wants Malays to walk on their own, unaided by the Government or government agencies. He says the dependence mentality is still very much there. And that is why he worries. And despite doing so much for the Malays, his most vehement critics come from the Malay community. That is painful.

There is another lesson here: Once something is given to someone often enough, he takes it for granted and then it becomes difficult to take it away. If it is perceived as a right, then the real problem begins.

Of all our prime ministers, he has done the most to uplift Islam in the country. Countless programmes continue to be held and much allocation has gone into it. Probably more allocations have been given to it than any other area over the years, if you take into account that every ministry uses a portion of its allocation for Islamic activities.

Yet, he is accused of not doing enough for Islam. He has even been portrayed as criticising Islam. That is painful. Especially so for a man who has done so much for his religion and is working to repair the damage done to it's image by zealots and extremists.

Perhaps that is why he sometimes cries. Here again, perhaps, we see the non-conformist at work. He does not claim credit for what has been achieved but cries over what he thinks he has not achieved.

Mahathir's dilemma reminds me of the saying of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "If I accept you as you are, I will make you worse; however if I treat you as though you are what you are capable of becoming, I help you become that."

In a way, Mahathir is a victim of his own success. The very Malays who were able to go for tertiary studies and enjoy a better lifestyle due to his government's policies, now attack him and the Government. That is

painful.

Imagine a father doing everything he can for a son and then when the son is a success, he finds fault with the father. How would the father feel? Here is another lesson for you and young people like you: learn to appreciate the sacrifices of your parents and elders. Before you criticise your parents, before you brush them aside as being out of tune with the times, pause. Just consider some of the things they have done for you.

Do you think it is easy bringing up children? Do you think it is easy trying to give the best possible to one's son or daughter? Can you imagine the sleepless nights we spend when you are ill or the agony of being unable to fathom why you decide to do this or that? Can you imagine the prayers we say when you go for an outing or to study outstation or sit for your examinations?

I am not saying all parents are great. We have our problems and weaknesses too. And there are some parents who don't bother about their children's future. But most parents do.

Running a family too requires leadership qualities. And most parents, like Mahathir, want to understand and be understood. Take care.

God bless you,