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Sensitivity, not weakness was on display

A REGULAR reader of this column, Halimah Said, contributes this:

"Dr Mahathir and the Malay Psyche: It was a Roman tragedy enacted on Malaysian soil except that it was Caesar who shed tears for his people. And there was no Brutus or Jebat or Shahrir (Samad) to take credit for it.

"My heart felt for Dr Mahathir, the man and all he stands for. My soul bled for the Malays and all that we are. For both are tender and fragile indeed.

"For what was spontaneously demonstrated in that moment of crisis was not the sloth, self-indulgence and hypocrisy of the modern-day Malay but his nicer rustic nature - the old world charm and sincerity of a people (any people) who loved their leader and were devastated by his going.

"What the whole world witnessed through BBC and CNN was the leader and his people united in the throes of a nation's crisis. What was special about this Malaysian scenario was that it was inspired by the natural softness of the old Malay heart, not the cultivated hardness of the new one.

"Political analysts and armchair cynics will be quick (as quickly as they themselves can recover from the shock) to brutally brand this as yet another Umno fiasco, yet another evidence of Malay (of Dr Mahathir's) weakness. This we know they will argue till the cows come home. This we know will be written in the history books. For history we know offers us a general perspective.

"And the general perspective on the Malays has always been a negative one. From the time of the early British administrators, the Malay psyche has taken a beating. Even the pro-Malay Swettenham said: 'The Malays had no initiative whatever: they were there to do what their chief told them - no more, no less', and summed up the colonial belief that 'the Malay, despite his charm, was indolent and shiftless and resistant to change and progress'.

"As early as 1894, the early Malay Press under the leadership of jawi peranakan and Arab parentage published a series of articles on Mengapa Melayu Layu, offering 'a scathing analysis of the alleged reasons for Malay economic and educational backwardness ... their lack of industry and ambition, their hostility toward anyone who showed exceptional talent, and their inability to practise mutual self-help'. More recent home-grown tirades rave and rant about lack of motivation and drive in the modern Malay.

"How we have taken a beating. And what a beating it was in the week prior to the Umno general assembly outburst!

"As we move on to realise the promises we make to ourselves, our families and friends; as we strive to achieve our goals and visions; as we grow in national strength and might we must not forget the one thing we will in the end be remembered by - our sincerity and niceness. Perhaps the tears that we shed - in the midst of it all - are the latent perspective on the Malay psyche!"

(END)