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A bouquet for Dr Mahathir

Zainal Mokhtar

WHAT do you say of someone without losing sincerity, praise him without sounding gratuitous, and wish him well without being sycophantic? It's a hard act; but then he is a tough act.

You can't count the years and say that is the quantum of his goodness. Nor can you look at his pictures and say this is the portrait of the man. And if you stress the latter, then people may say that you are glorifying a mere human to the level of a superhuman, which he is not. Like any human, he is not without his failings. Sure he has his bad side, weaknesses and shortcomings.

At this moment of retirement from public position, it's all too easy to open the floodgates of sentimentality and pour unmitigated eulogies that may well drown out the genuine acclaim that is intended. I would not for anything miss this opportunity to say this: what Malaysia is watching is the passing of an era. We ought to treasure this moment.

He didn't burst onto the scene like Rambo, and single-handedly defeat all his enemies, although he certainly often tried. There were the years in political wilderness, times of uncertain fate, and longer than expected periods of seeming discouragement.

I wish I had gotten more of this pie they are all talking about, but that is my doing. I wish my neighbours would look at me more as a fellow Malaysian rather than my ethnicity, but we're on talking terms. I wish we didn't have 97 and 911, but that was beyond even his control. But hey, we're not doing too badly.

We had everything that could have gone against us. We are a small nation, there are too many cultural differences; we are too dependent on other countries for our goods and services; our national politics is too parochial and we still worry about education and health and old age. And yet, we are managing.

And in no small way this has been the contribution of his leadership. The previous Prime Ministers have laid the groundwork for him, let's not forget.

All too often in history the great contribution of a leader is appreciated only when he is dead and gone. It will be a sad thing if we fail to record our appreciation now for what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has done.

Thanks, Doc. God bless you. May you live a long and healthy life.

ZAINAL MOKHTAR

Seremban