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Pak Lah needs the space and time to be himself

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IF, and it is a big IF depending on one's beliefs, in life we are said to get what we deserve then it has to be accepted we get the leaders we deserve.

And if, another big IF on the same premise, nothing is said to happen by chance then the two can be accepted together. In short it means it is best we go with the flow and make the best of what we have because collectively we are responsible and accountable for everything.

And, as Mahatma Mohandas K. Gandhi put it, if we want change we must individually change in order to bring about the changes we desire around us.

In the succession the country has just witnessed, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has taken over from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad whose 22 years at the helm moved the nation in a certain direction.

The same has been true in the case of the Prime Ministers who came before, beginning with Tengku Abdul Rahman.

Pak Lah can be expected to set his own direction even though he is seen to be moving in the general direction of his predecessors. He has the advantage of the rich experience he has gained over the years.

Thus, in all fairness, Malaysians must allow him to do what he sees as his bounden duty without undue politicking or pressure.

First and foremost, it may do the rest of us a lot of good if we recognised that he is one who listens and to his inner voice at that. Call it instinct, conscience. Going by his past record it has not failed him.

To all intents and purposes, his heart has always been with Umno and its leaders. It has not been blind loyalty to its leaders.

There was a time he felt differently about its leadership. And he can eat humble pie when he needs to and that must be counted among his strengths.

He has shown he is not one to try and be somebody else to suit the whims and fancies of others. Like anyone else, he needs support. Of the right kind.

It is about accepting him for what he is and stands for and, for the rest of us, it is a matter of adjusting to his brand of leadership.

After all, he is the leader and in the context of the nation, there is only one Prime Minister. Those who aspire to be one must wait their turn. That has been the experience which has helped the nation remain politically stable all this while.

Pak Lah intends to work with others because, as he has put it, he cannot work alone. Leadership at the top is never easy and can be lonely at times.

But it is necessary to be alone when tough decisions have to be made and they require deep reflection, going within to search the conscience. He has to be by himself and in silence. He needs the space and time and we will all do him a big favour by giving him that.

Pak Lah will have many such decisions to make. It goes with the job he has taken on with little or no apparent misgivings. He might have been reluctant if he did not know himself well enough.

Obviously, he is his own best friend and it is up to us to have faith in him as he goes about drawing the line on what is acceptable, what is not, what is important or not and what needs priority and what can wait.

Pak Lah can be expected to ask for advice and, in itself, it is

indication of personal strength and comfort because it is admission that he does not have all the imperatives for the decisions he has to make.

Unsolicited advice will have to be carefully weighed and, as he has had reason to indicate, he wants people to tell him what he ought to hear, the truth, painful as it might be, and not what he would like to hear.

What Pak Lah has done so far is some indication of what he has set his mind and heart to. His predecessor has ensured he has his work cut out for him in more ways than one. He will never be able to do everything he wants to because that is in the nature of things, leaders have to admit, readily or not.

When the time comes, he will have to hand over the reins of power with this simple realisation: There is that which is within his control and that which is not. Recognition and acceptance of that which is not is what really differentiates leadership styles.

Who he is, what he hopes to achieve and how he intends to achieve it will become clear in the coming days, months and years he holds office.