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Dawn of a new era

Ahmad A. Talib

Dear Pak Lah,

AS dawn breaks, a new day begins and you wake up to the stark realisation that you shall now lead a charming Nation, full of contradictions, and for her people, great expectations. Alhamdulillah (God be Praised)! I'm sure your mother will be very proud of you, as will Kak Endon and the rest of your family. God, in all His wisdom, has placed you at such high office and, as His humble servant, I am sure you will do well. Besides your family, I'm sure you will seek His divine guidance in the course of your work leading the people and country.

We congratulate you for taking over the helm, in the midst of fanfare and justified celebrations to honour your predecessor whom many Malaysians know as the only Prime Minister, and one who has steered our Nation to such standing and stature, that the world inevitably takes stock of. As you'd undoubtedly agree, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's contributions are obvious for all to see.

To carry on and follow through the act with equal tenacity may seem frightening to some. But resilience and patience, which are central to your character, Pak Lah, will hold you steady to handle the challenge. Ergo, you are your own man. Many have compared you with Dr Mahathir but I think this may be a little unwise. You have your own attributes and your personality is uniquely yours. You have weathered personal and professional trauma and not allowed them to distract you from your goals. In time, both you and the Nation will adjust to a differing style of administration.

We have hopes and aspirations as a Nation and together we shall continue to take control of our destiny. Challenges abound, domestically and internationally. Your priorities are mapped out for sure but we need reminders to ensure all pockets of society are looked out for. If I may be so bold as to suggest, Pak Lah, you may want to take a much closer study of the effectiveness of the bureaucracy and do serious battle with allegations of graft and corruption. To calm our fears, you may also make crime prevention as one of your priority items in the coming months.

We all have differing needs. Improvement of basic food and shelter and steady employment for the less fortunate; enhanced and conducive environment for investors to enjoy; sustainable growth and income to ensure profitability of companies; improved delivery channels of the government machinery are areas I'm sure will be under your close attention. I'm also certain you will want the private sector to continue to act as the nation's engine of growth. The list will remain endless and expectations will never waver. These are mammoth tasks. But you are not alone. You have able, astute and supportive cabinet members and political leaders who are ever willing to serve. I'm also sure they can be depended upon and be accountable for lack of coordination and efforts (if any) in serving our Nation. And you have us, the common man and woman, who will lend you our support to lead us to greater heights.

Pak Lah, you know what everyone is saying - it can be lonely at the top. But I would argue that it need not necessarily be so. Sometimes, friends and colleagues tell me, all of us need time to be alone - to reflect, reminisce, plan and strategise. Many times, we also think better when we are alone. In any case, you'll never be alone because your family and we ordinary folks will be with you. No one knows the pressure of high office

better than you. Therefore, you know best how to divide your time between work and family, between the Nation and the rest of the world. You must also find time to play some golf. I've seen you tee off before and that's not a major area of concern. With time for music and other leisure pursuits, I'm sure you will certainly rise to the challenge as Malaysia's fifth Prime Minister. By the way, whenever I think of you, I am reminded of a verse from Usman Awang's sajak titled Melayu. It goes...

Berkelahi cara Melayu
Menikam dengan pantun
Menyanggah dengan senyum
Marahnya dengan diam
Merendah bukan menyembah
Meninggi bukan melonjak

This edition of the New Straits Times is a special one published to welcome you. Supported by our friends in the private sector and other well-meaning corporates, we managed to get it out as our means of showing our appreciation to you. We wish you all the best in your future work. One final word - Enjoy your work, Pak Lah.

May God Bless You.

With warm regards and kind thoughts,
Ahmad A. Talib
Group Editor, NST