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Finding cure for Malay afflictions

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THE 22 years under the leadership of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad were a glorious period of development in Malaysia.

In that period, the image of Malaysia was transformed from just another backward former British colony to the world's 18th largest trading nation.

Initial sceptics became true "believers" almost overnight and every Malaysian seemed to be jumping on Dr Mahathir's economic bandwagon - everyone except a significant portion of the Malays.

When asked what he wished he could have done better, Dr Mahathir answered that "I wish I could have been more firm with the Malays".

Indeed, he had foreseen the Malays' tendency to be complacent in his book - The Malay Dilemma, long before serious thought was given to the matter.

When he became the country's fourth Prime Minister, countless policies and programmes were put forth, apparently to no significant avail.

Some Malays did seize the moment, venturing up their own development ladder, improving their quality of life and often becoming quickly contented with their bounty.

When new boundaries and new horizons were opening up countless windows of opportunity, they happily sit back and watched them all float by, offering their comments and criticisms - laced with hatred, jealousy and cynicism.

For all of Dr Mahathir's forward thinking leadership, the Malays - a significant chunk of them - failed to embrace Malaysia's rapid progress and what they could get out of it.

Coincidentally, the term "malaise" has all of these unhealthy terminologies as its synonyms - depression, dissatisfaction, melancholy - all extremely "popular" Malay traits.

That is the harsh reality that the new Prime Minister faces as he takes over from Dr Mahathir.

I firmly believe that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is the perfect successor to Dr Mahathir - a balanced out continuity in our nation's leadership.

Sure, Dr Mahathir had set a high standard and everyone unanimously agreed that his was a tough act to follow. But I'm sure that Pak Lah was cut from the same cloth as Dr Mahathir, only from a less attention-grabbing patch of the same fine silk.

Many agendas would be on Pak Lah's mind, not the least finding a permanent cure for the Malays ailing, seemingly hereditary afflictions. For Abdullah - Malaysia's fifth Prime Minister - may Allah guide you in your quest to take Malaysia to greater heights.

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