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Show our departing captain we are worthy of trust

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BEING separated from one's parents is an event that causes anxiety among all children. No matter how old we are there is still a degree of anxiety. All that changes is the manner in which the anxiety is presented.

When toddlers see their parents leave the room, there are howls and screams. "Don't leave me alone," they howl. The six-year-old child may cry in fear of abandonment. In primary school, there are sometimes questions about where the parent will be. The anxiety is soon appeased as many children have handphones, and thus have access to their parents.

Adolescents and adults also display anxiety when a parent leaves for a trip, but this time the feeling focuses on concerns for the safety and well-being of the parent. Gone are the self-centered feelings of the child. The progression of anxiety has moved from looking inward to oneself to looking outward to others.

Malaysia is preparing to witness the retirement of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. As he prepares to leave office, I wonder what the experience must be like for him and those that remain.

Observing the reactions so far, I sometimes wonder if the behaviour of those staying on is akin to a young child who only looks inward and is thinking about his own personal advancement. Perhaps I am seeking more mature behaviour, where our leader is allowed to go his way and our concerns are only for his future well-being and peace of mind.

Every parent is a leader within his family. They initially lead and eventually guide and nurture their children, hoping the children will one day be strong enough and wise enough to independently look after the household.

When the time comes, the remaining fibres of the emotional umbilical cord that binds parent to child are severed, and the parent walks into the evening of life. The child who continues to cling to the arms of the departing parent demonstrates helplessness and is a disappointment to the parent.

He only wanted to leave the child with a legacy of what he stood for and good wishes for the future.

If one considers life a constant battle for survival, then the flag that leads the battle charge must never fall. Just as a captain about to lead a charge may ask his soldiers, a parent may ask his child "If I should fall, who will take my place and hold our flag up?" If the soldiers have been well trained, all will step forward, and answer in unison "We will". Are we heeding Dr Mahathir's call and willing to step forward in this manner?

While leading the nation, Dr Mahathir has helped us weather many storms. As we ventured into international waters, he helped us steer clear of the unknown dangers. Through the journey, many have been nurtured by this captain, and like many crews, there have been disagreements, resulting in many deputies who have come and gone. Despite this, Malaysia is still afloat and sailing, to meet the challenges of the future.

Soon, our captain will take the bridge for the last time. On that day, there will be many familiar faces to be gazed upon, and hands to be clasped. At each turn, every object in sight will evoke memories of happy and sad times.

In reminiscing, he might even wish "Oh, if only for one last time, the clock could be turned back to revive a long past moment of glory."

Finally, he descends the gangway with prayers for his crew's well-being

and a wish that they will keep the Government afloat. Perhaps, his parting words might be, "Please look after my country. It is now in your hands."

Writing this piece, I wondered what thoughts I would have about the whole affair. Would I be child-like and howl for him to stay to make sure that our country was well run? As I contemplated the situation, I found myself only wishing him well, and that he would spend the evening of his life in peace and reflection. Perhaps, in times of need, he might be approached for his insights on how to cope with the situation.

Many are rushing forward to pay tribute and organise farewell functions as Dr Mahathir prepares to retire. Amid the cacophony I wondered what he would want for himself. Searching for clues I found the message, in a foreword for a book he recently wrote for me.

Senior citizens are assets of the country. They have given the best years of their lives in contributing to our development. It is a responsibility among us all to remember their efforts and provide them with the comfort they deserve.

The father of our Malaysian family is about to retire. Let us allow him and his wife to age gracefully. In nation-building, let us continue to build upon and maintain the bridges that he built to cross each treacherous river.

Finally, let us leave his handphone in peace as we show him that we are capable of looking after ourselves. In time, perhaps, all his good wishes will come true, as our family continues to hold up the flag of peace and prosperity in Malaysia.

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