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The hallmark of great leadership

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THERE are lessons to learn from great leadership and the peaceful transition of power.

It is not just who leaders are and what they do but also what people expect them to do.

In fact, questions will be asked regarding what leaders do not do or what they do badly.

The true mettle of leaders is revealed during times of crises when leaders stand alone.

Their abilities may also be revealed during times of plenty and popularity when forgetfulness, complacency, lavishness and neglect set in. Good leaders are on alert all the time. There is the realisation that there is so little time to do so many things.

Leaders who carry the burden of State secrets and who make decisions on war and peace have to rise above and beyond themselves.

They seek divine guidance or the counsel of elders or draw upon every nerve of virtue to make the right decisions, regardless of allies or enemies.

Leaders must, therefore, be principled people whose reactions must address immediate concerns. Often, leaders are lonely people. They lead others to do what they can do but dare not do.

Self-leadership is a necessary prerequisite before one can lead others.

Great leadership entails a great team. In these great teams are individuals with different but complementary competencies who subscribe to the shared vision and common destiny.

They uphold common values, virtues and principles.

From literature, observation and study, it would seem that great leaders from different times, cultures and domains share some common fundamental insights.

Great leaders have a clear idea of where to navigate society under circumstance of chaos, turbulence, uncertainty, ambiguity and contradictions.

They have a strong perception of right and wrong and a profound understanding of the world.

They have a wide circle of competent and sincere advisors who are committed to the development of society.

They listen, understand and acquire in-depth ideas which are incorporated into the big picture of national development.

They learn and understand that there is a need to use mature knowledge to make operational and strategic decisions.

They are compassionate and merciful and they are bound by ethics and personal conscience.

They challenge the status quo, lead, inspire, encourage and create conditions for others to act.

They take calculated risks with good intentions, and they display a wisdom to initiate a new level of growth for all.

In Malaysian political and public history, never have so many paid such high tribute to a leader who steps out of office as in the case of the former Prime Minister.

There have been spontaneous and widespread appreciation for Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He is viewed as the person who paved the way for the ordinary person to

do extraordinary things.

In all societies, the masses and the elites are not especially generous to their leaders. They love their leaders when their leaders are successful. They are full of blame and vile when their leaders fail in the attempted acts of leadership.

Even when intentions and actions are for the general good, the masses and their heads would pile on all kinds of criticisms to detract and diminish every good deed done and achieved.

Such is the way of society in which the citizenry is not intellectually critical and enlightened and can be easily manipulated.

Knowing what we know about how society can be manipulated and how the most highly educated of people can be the mover of evil deeds, educators have new challenges to face.

Friend or foe must be judged by the same moral and ethical standards and must be appreciated for their actual contributions, with no subtraction and addition of deeds for the common good.

Only when the citizenry is able to be fair and discriminating can educators really claim that the outcomes of their efforts are positive.

For as long as the citizenry can be manipulated by the blatant propagandist and the covert persuader, the education system has failed in its task - which is to educate students who are future leaders in developing and mastering the competencies of critical and fair judgment of ideas, events and persons.

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