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Time to lose fear of speaking out

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THE relative silence of the voices in support of the truth that was laid bare by the Prime Minister in his speech to the OIC Summit is truly revealing of the society we live in.

True, most Malaysians voice support and admiration for his forthrightness when we talk about it among ourselves, but why has there been a dearth of public proclamations of support for what he said, both from the public and from some of our leaders? Are we afraid to antagonise certain quarters for fear of a backlash? Do we not have the courage of our convictions?

This has always been a problem of our society, this fear of speaking out and expressing our views. Regardless of race, very few of us would say anything that might be controversial or that may potentially earn the ire of others, even if we know that our views are correct and true.

This is an age-old problem, which has led Westerners to view Asians as meek and submissive. It seems that decades after being freed from the shackles of colonialism, little has changed in terms of our attitude.

We still prefer to keep silent, we still prefer to sit in the back rows, we still prefer not to ruffle feathers, even if it is for the sake of something we truly believe in.

Dr Mahathir's leadership has taught us much, but of all the lessons that can be learnt, nothing is clearer than the need to be forthright and courageous in speaking out for what we believe in.

As we look back the last 22 years surely an obvious lesson is that on many occasions, unpopular things must be said and done to bring about change and improvement.

We must not be intimidated by others and we must not forever watch from the sidelines so as to avoid being dragged into the fray.

As a people, we must choose to be recognised as one that would not be so easily swayed into believing anything and everything that is shoved down our throats nor one that would sit silently and motionlessly in the face of adversity and injustice.

There must be a paradigm shift. Our attitudes, mindsets and self-image must be altered for the better, if indeed we are to progress. We must not think our views are inadequate or insignificant. We have as much right to express ourselves as anyone, especially if that of which we speak happens to be the plain truth.

As Dr Mahathir's administration comes to an end, we witness a bewildering range of tributes, praise and honour being deservedly showered upon this great statesman. But perhaps the best tribute we can give to Dr Mahathir is to emulate him and strive to become as forthright, as bold and as courageous as he is.

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