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## *Need to address criticism head-on*

**F**ORMER premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad made news recently when he raised questions on issues related to the government decisions and policies which he felt warrants explanation.

In his usual trademark character, he did not mince words when clarifying that he did not agree with some of the government's actions and explanations on related issues.

The stature of his contribution with regards to the progress of this nation, just like his predecessors, makes it quite irrational for anyone to simply brush aside or take his comments lightly.

Even now, a significant number of Malaysians view his comments and opinions seriously and rightly so. His track record does speak for itself, despite arguably not being perfect.

Whether his opinions are echoed by a significant portion of the people or not, is subject to debate, but, going by the feedback in his blog and during public appearances, it is reasonable to conclude that his opinions do carry some weight.

Having said that, his recent frank and strong criticisms should be viewed as they are — as comments from an experienced statesman, which in this instance, echo some of the people's concerns, and therefore, deserve fair response.

Thus a clear, concise and satisfactory response from that perspective should be given, to put all the questions and concerns to rest.

Understandably, nobody likes to be criticised and the government is no exception. Already, there are those attempting to justify the issues concerned by using polemics to discredit and counter-criticise Dr Mahathir, rebutting his strong comments rather than focusing on answering the concerns raised.

This is where I believe Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his government can demonstrate that they are different from their predecessors.

Firstly, the government can

choose a new paraalgsi in handiing criticism.

Rather than follow the normal reflex to be in denial or defensive mode, why not choose to address it head-on, clearing any ambiguities or uncertainties conclusively. There should not be any lingering points left for speculation.

Undoubtedly, it will not be easy, especially if indeed errors did occur for some reason or other, but that is the whole point.

Sincerity and transparency are valued more by Malaysians, versus attempts to defend, as if the government must be perfect.

If there are no errors, then queries should be answered, with clear facts. Conflicting responses

or miscommunication should be avoided, and more importantly, diffused swiftly.

I strongly believe leaders, such as Dr Mahathirj or Malaysians for that matter, do not expect the government to be perfect. That would be quite ridiculous.

Disagreements are not unusual even after justifications have been provided.

But, in my opinion, when reasonable criticisms, be they from senior leaders or otherwise, are handled satisfactorily, it is a healthy sign on how the country is progressing.

If the government can be constructively proactive and less emotional in justifying its actions and

approaches, then, to me, it is a sign that we have a dynamic, confident and strong government, which can work within the society's check-and-balance mechanisms, whether it is via critics or proponents.

Secondly, in a world where information floods our attention space almost every minute and is accessible by the touch of a Anger in seconds, any information disseminated for the public's knowledge must be concise and accurate in detail and narrative.

Using jargons, vague generalised deAnitions or simple dlsmissive remarks, unfortunately, will not cut it anymore with the public.

Due to the available accessible information, Malaysians are more scrutinising and critical when answers tend to skirt around issues, instead of being straight to the

point and accurate.

In the final analysis, I believe Malaysians harbour great hopes in Najib's leadership of the government chosen by the majority, to administer and steer Malaysia towards Vision 2020, and most certainly beyond, despite inevitable evolving challenges.

Contrary to common conclusion, criticisms and comments will only make the government stronger, dynamic and fearless, as it spearheads the idea of transforming a proud nation to be a better one for future generations — provided that it does not choose to adopt the archaic mindset where criticisms are viewed as a bane, rather than a boon.

**Sugiman Sabri,**  
Alor Star, Kedah