

Of being a Malay

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Article

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THE deputy prime minister was quoted as saying: "The Malay mind must, therefore, be driven towards learning and training in positive, creative, lateral, proactive and innovative thinking.

"The most important investment that a Malay family can make is not the procurement of land, property or fancy cars, but in their children's education."

Perhaps at this juncture, it is useful to recall an old Malay saying: *Orang tua-tua berkata, jika ada wang beli emas. Jual emas, beli berlian, jual berlian beli manikam. Jual manikam, beli ilmu.*

It is plain to see from the profound saying that the Malays have always regarded ilmu (knowledge) as the highest form of wealth.

However, this has somehow been neglected as the community is in the rat race to be successful solely based on material terms.

Many dream of material possessions in excess of what they are used to, not unlike the fictitious story of *Mat Jenin*.

Some even talk of how many Malay millionaires can be created over a period of time as a symbol of success.

Such an ambition is not wrong but it must be premised on a strong foundation of education embedded in the wisdom of the Malay world-view.

Unfortunately, this not always the case. There have been suggestions that the Malays must adopt the practices of being *kurang ajar*, or that of a *kiasu*, just because others seems to earn their achievements in similar ways.

The means seem to justify the end, regardless of the consequences on the community's cultural values and norms, what more the future of the Malay civilisation as the thrust of nation-building.

The contradiction is too glaring not to argue that the Malay traditional wisdom on what education stands for is on its way out.

There was a time when they did not mind not having fancy this and that, unless the means are justified. There were many instances when success meant a fine balance between spiritual and material progress, with the former taking priority. And ethics and etiquette were of prime consideration.

To them the notion of progress and success is the nature way of *rasmi padi*. *Semakin berisi semakin tunduk*, a notion akin to Jim Collin's Level 5 leadership in his book *Good to Great* (2001).

Hence, as a community, the Malay treasures a humble but respectful way of life that is at peace within itself and nature as a mark of success and progress.

For example, land is not procured if it means that "peace" must be sacrificed.

While they are concerned about development, they are equally concerned not to transgress their traditional wisdom and values, let alone lose them.

They want to be materially rich, but not to the extent that they worship wealth as is the case today.

Perhaps, they are those whom the DPM was referring to when he described a generation made up of individuals who possessed good manners, and were steeped in knowledge and understanding of religion and other disciplines.

A generation that is confident of their culture, values and its nuances that can withstand the pressures of modernisation and globalisation by providing a basis of identity and spirituality to the community.

Otherwise, it is rendered as nothing more than a mere utilitarian group. Aptly, there is yet another pearl of wisdom that says it is all right to let the wind blow from all directions across the room as long as one is not swept away by it.

But sad to say, many of the present Malay community can longer claim the same for themselves. They have paid a high price for their fancy cars, castle-like mansions and vast procurement of property.

And while they may be totally comfortable in a global setting, they remain insensitive to the "local" dimensions and appeal.

Being kurang ajar or kiasu is their "new recipe" to success despite these being clearly alien, and indeed, repugnant to the Malay way of life, not to say Islam.

In short, it is not just the question of education but also what and which education and for whom?

Invariably, it is time to go back to the roots of the Malay worldview forged on the concept of "*budi*" — *budi pekerti*, *budi bicara* and *budi bahasa* — that had been so central to the community's well being and that of Malaysia.

In doing so we can infuse again the basic noble culture that is allegedly missing as implied by the deputy prime minister during the Third Malay Agenda Seminar held recently.

But we must wait no more.

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