

Promoting a civil public service

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THIS year's *Majlis Perdana Perkhidmatan Awam Keenam* function where the Prime Minister delivered this annual address to civil servants, was different in a refreshing sort of way.

Not only was the message conveyed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi significantly different, the venue too was reassuring. Held for the first time at the majestic Putrajaya International Conference Centre, there was an aura of importance and grandeur added to it.

It set the mind for bigger things to come as prompted by the title *Merealisasi Aspirasi Rakyat Melalui Perkhidmatan Awam Yang Berbudhi Bahasa* (Realising people's aspirations through a civil public service).



Call to instil good values: Abdullah civil servants in Putrajaya.

What is also new is the use of words such as *budi bahasa* — one of the trilogy of *budi*: *budi pekerti* and *budi bicara* being the other two.

Budi has no accurate equivalent in English, although it can be rendered as "virtue".

What more the trilogy of *budi* which roughly relates to being courteous and polite, well behaved and well mannered, and also fair-minded as well as of appropriate judgment.

The nexus of the three *budi* has a deep-rooted meaning and symbolism in Malay language and culture — an intangible measure of how mature and sensitive the individual or society is.

The loss or absence of any of the three will amount to being uncouth or uncultured.

When all three are missing, it is downright uncivilised — be it in service or extending even to life itself.

Still, the three *budi* receive little regard or meaning nowadays, especially in a world that is caught up in mere tangible wealth, where the end justifies the means.

This explains, at least in parts the social state of being we are in today. Indeed, the three *budi* are more than just about client or customer relations management as keenly promoted today.

It is more than just personality traits to be acquired during an intensive course. Rather it is culturally well-embedded in the character of humility — a "soft" dimension of power that drives and safeguards the society as a harmonious whole.

It is a principle that advocates compromises rather than conflict, consensus rather than confrontation.

In many ways, it is a value-based approach that is relevant in meeting the aspirations of the people as the title of Prime Minister's address implied.

Unfortunately, today, things are ruled by "hard" power — forwardness, at times aggression and blatant instructions — giving rise to more conflicts and confrontations.

What is implied (*tersirat*) is no longer sufficient nor understood. It has to be direct and sometimes brings in the use of "raw" authority.

Each of the 3,000-odd participants at the Putrajaya gathering were provided with a 36-page bilingual booklet entitled 101 *Famous Quotations: Adab, Knowledge and Excellence* which is food for the intellect (which at times means *budi*, as in *akal budi*).

If this is not enough, before the start of the address, the quotations were graphically displayed on the two giant screens for all to savour.

Quite appropriately, the word *adab* was left untranslated as it is intricately intertwined with the word *budi*. *Adab* too has a civilisational dimension to it, as in the *perabadan*.

In other words, to the Malays without *budi*, *adab* can hardly exist, and vice versa, unless in hypocrisy which today is in abundance.

Hopefully then, this time the lessons learnt are more than what meets the eyes (and ears), namely the appreciation of what is implied (*tersirat*) from the Prime Minister two-hour address.

After all, the Prime Minister correctly characterised his message as *dari hati ke hati; mata ke mata* (heart-to-heart; eye-to-eye) for it is in the heart that the implied is intuitively deciphered, and it is the eye that sincerely communicate the true meaning of what is implied.

Unless *adab* and *budi* are genuinely nurtured and their interplay is well rehearsed, the heart and eye will merely serve as a window exposing the hypocrisy within.

In short, citing the first quotation in the booklet, it is worth remembering that it is *adab* (and thus *budi*) that maketh the person.

For all Malaysians, the nexus of the three *budi* must be their primary concern as we would expect from the wise, a *budiman*, a person of *budi*.

More so for those who serve the people, as demonstrated by Malaysia's No 1 public servant — the Prime Minister himself.

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