

TUN ABDUL RAZAK BIN DATO' HUSSEIN - A PRIME MINISTER WHO "WALKED THE TALK"

Nowadays you read in the papers that there are so many "hanky-panky", both in the public and private sectors – bosses stealing from the company coffers, employees making false claims and bribery and corruption being reported almost daily. The 2010 Auditor-General's Report also revealed several indiscretions and wrongdoings. The controversy surrounding the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) is one such example. How do we inculcate good ethics amongst our people? I am well aware that changing the attitude and behaviour of the people is difficult and would take time but it can be done if the change journey is led by the political leaders and the top management team in the private sector. I believe that change should come from the top. There is an old Chinese saying that "the fish rots from the head". This implies that if leaders are not upright then the culture of putting a hand in the kitty would be difficult to eradicate. Leaders must "walk the talk", "model the way", and lead by example. What happened to the slogan "Pimpinan Mengikut Teladan" (Leadership by Example) and "Bersih, Cekap, Amanah" (Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy) introduced by a former Prime Minister. Were these slogans remained as "just slogan" and not practised and applied in their daily lives. If the leaders are upright they would not "close one eye" and sweep indiscretions "under the carpet". In his article "Ethical Leadership and the National Integrity Plan" Datuk Dr Sulaiman Mahbob (now Tan Sri), former President of the Malaysian Institute of Integrity (IIM), wrote that " Political leaders have a significant role in contributing to ethical leadership. Without the support of political leaders it will be difficult to fight corruption and to promote good governance in both private and public sectors. In this context political leaders must see it as a moral responsibility to promote integrity and ethics in all strata of administration and management in the country. In making decisions, the politicians must make sure that their decisions are morally right. As stated by Abraham Lincoln, "Whatever is morally wrong can never be politically right."

One of the Prime Ministers that I know who lived with fairness, integrity, service and human dignity, displayed ethical leadership and made decisions that were morally right, was our second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak bin Dato' Hussein. Tun Razak was appointed Deputy Prime Minister after Merdeka in 1957 and succeeded Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister in September 1970. Tun Razak passed away in London on 14 January 1976 of leukemia, just two months shy of 54.

I remember Tun Razak well. I was only nine when I first met him. He was a good friend of my father, Tan Sri Taib Andak. My husband, Dato Shafee Yahaya served as his Private Secretary for almost six years, from 12 June 1969 to 1 June 1995. Tun Razak had left behind

a legacy – the conception of initiatives such as the Razak Education Report and the Red Book; the establishment of educational institutions including University Malaya, Institut Teknologi MARA, Serdang College of Agriculture and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; the creation of the New Economic Policy and setting up of relevant organisations such as FELDA, MARA, FELCRA, RISDA, FAMA, and Bank Pertanian; the development of trade and industry via FIDA/MIDA, PERNAS and State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs) and the establishment of PETRONAS, to name a few. However, more importantly, he left behind a value system of integrity, honesty, hard work, morality, caring and loyalty to the nation. The evidence can be gleaned from Tun Razak's behaviour and character.

Being privileged to serve and observe Tun Razak up close, Shafee said that the qualities that endeared him to so many, amongst others were his sincerity and caring attitude for his fellowmen, irrespective of origin, race, rank or religion, especially for the underprivileged. This was reflected in his direct efforts in implementing measures to give “land for the landless, jobs for the jobless”. He was simple and direct, no mere sloganeering or PR show of words. Thus the creation of the NEP, FELDA, FELCRA, MARA and the small scale industries.

Shafee recalls an incident when Tun Razak did not allow Tun Rahah to change the curtains and re-upholster the furniture in the living room of their official residence, Sri Taman, even though the curtains and furniture were showing signs of wear and tear. Tun Razak said the old ones were still in good condition and he did not want to spend the rakyat's money unnecessarily. The simple furnishings in Sri Taman reflected Tun Razak's thrift and respect for public funds.

Shafee also remembers that Tun Razak had a high respect for the rule of law. He did not interfere in the legal institutions or enforcement of the laws.

Dato' Abdul Rahman Hamidon, who served as Secretary of the National Operations Council (NOC) after 13 May 1969 related to me an incident that reflected Tun Razak's sense of integrity and accountability. “One morning, Tun Razak called me and said, I'm going to Kelantan and Rahah wants to go too but I cannot take her because the government won't pay for this. I asked him to take her and that NOC would pay for it as he was the Director of Operations. Tun Razak refused the offer as he did not want the people to talk about it. In the end Tun Rahah had to go to Kelantan by herself, by car.” And that's the type of man we had running the country at that time. Let alone now, going overseas and taking their wives and children”.

Dato' Rahman also remembers the incident when he was invited by Tun Razak to accompany him to Burma in 1970, together with some friends. Rahman thought it was going to be an all-expenses paid holiday. He was taken aback when Tun Razak informed him that he had not only to pay for all the expenses (air-fare and accommodation) but also to apply for leave.

When Tun Razak went for his medical check-up in London in December 1975, he submitted a medical chit showing he was ill, like any other public servant, before asking for money for the trip. To save money, he did not even take his wife along. This was confirmed by Dato'

Mohd Nordin Idris, who was his aide-de-camp from 1973 – Jan 1976. Only Dato' Mohd Nordin and Dr MacPherson accompanied Tun Razak to London. Shafee recalls with sadness that exactly two weeks after Tun Razak's death, he received a gift from Tun Razak through Nordin, an Austin Reed shirt which Tun Razak had purchased in London whilst undergoing treatment. Dato' Mohd Annuar Jusoh, Tun Razak's Political Secretary then, also received an Austin Reed shirt two weeks after his death. Tan Sri Zain Azraai, Tun Razak's Special Principal Private Secretary received a pair of shoes. To the end Tun Razak was selfless and remembered others.

Tan Sri Dato' Sri Abdullah Ahmad who served as Tun Razak's Political Secretary for 12 years from 1962-1974, said that "Tun Razak was very dedicated to his work, to the extent of being a workaholic and above all, he was incorruptible. When he died, he left behind only two modest houses – one in Kuala Lumpur, and the other, a rumah kampung in his constituency of Pekan Pahang. He had accumulated savings of RM100.000."

Dato' Mohd Annuar also said that Tun Razak was a good judge of character. He possessed the ability to identify capable people to head newly –formed organisations/corporations. However he would also first seek the views of others and check their credentials before making up his mind. His choice would be persons of high integrity with no "baggage", could make things happen and implement his vision rather than "yes" men. Annuar added that another of Tun Razak's strength was his ability to inspire and motivate people. He was professionally competent, had a natural drive and fundamental respect for, as well as a genuine interest in people. He was able to provide firm direction such that people were moved to go along with his ideas and buy into what he had set down. His persuasive style also motivated them. He was a real statesman, a great leader, who had dedicated his life, without heed to his state of health, to the development of his country and his people.

Ahmad Mustapha Hassan who served as Tun Razak's Press Secretary from 1975 until his death said that "Tun Razak was a man of humility, a very Malay trait. Egoism was not at all a part of his character. However he could be firm if the situation warranted. He was ever willing to listen and never used his authority to belittle what others said."

Tun Razak also demonstrated his firmness in combating corruption. Under him the Biro Siasatan Negara (BSN) was revived in August 1973. Additional powers and freedom were given to investigate and take action against corrupt officers and leaders, irrespective of their position. In a short time, he had inspired a new culture among civil servants and leaders, one that made them fear corruption and serve the nation.

Shafee remembers Tun Razak as being not an armchair leader but a hands-on one. He "walked the talk" and "practised what he preached". He travelled thousands of miles every month – by car, land rover, helicopter, boat, motorcycle, and bicycle. He even walked, to see for himself the progress of every development project in every corner of Malaysia. He brought the administration down to the kampung folks. He went there to teach, lead and inspire the officers and men responsible for the various undertakings. He even sought

the villagers' views on programmes and projects. His attention for details and strategic thinking in planning and implementation ensured officers were constantly up-to-date and proactive in their briefs to him.

Even though 36 years have elapsed since his passing Shafee is still indebted to Tun Razak for the advice and guidance that he gave Shafee whilst serving as his Private Secretary. Tun Razak was his role model and mentor. Shafee still remembers Tun Razak with the utmost respect as a man with a strict sense of conduct, discipline and humility. His tireless efforts in developing the country, his pursuit of ways to improve the lives of the rural poor, and his selflessness and belief in the principles of accountability, transparency and fairness will continue to remain with Shafee. Tun Razak's professionalism and moral philosophy will also continue to inspire Shafee and serve as a benchmark by which he can measure himself.

Tun Razak passed away without leaving much worldly wealth behind for his wife and children. But he left behind a lasting legacy – not only in terms of institutions and social economic reforms but, more importantly, he left behind a value system of integrity, honesty, hard work, caring, morality and loyalty to the nation. He died serving the nation until his last breath.

When one thinks of Tun Abdul Razak bin Dato' Hussein, one cannot help recalling the famous Malay saying:

“Lebih berharga mutiara sebutir daripada seluruh pasir dipantai”.
(It is more valuable to have one pearl than a whole beach of sand.)

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