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Need to listen to and hold dialogues with students

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A COMMUNICATIONS professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, in explaining the importance of "listening", posed a question: Why did God give us two ears and one mouth?

She wanted someone from Latin America to give the answer, the reason being those from Latin America and the Indian sub-continent were the most vocal in class. Only problem was they did not listen to the others.

A former Bolivian Ministry of Finance staff Romiro Ortega was not about to betray his fellow "Latinos". His reply was that "... it was a mistake".

But the point the professor was trying to make was that listening is important in communications. The mistake most often made is that people do not listen enough, she had stressed.

A similar point was made by Noorhamimah Mohd Baseri, a third-year Law and Islamic Studies student at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Stressing the importance of communications, she spoke of the need "to listen and hear" each other.

Listening to what others have to say is equally, if not, more important in communications.

Thus, when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says that the Government "listens" to investors' problems, it means the Government listens and acts on their suggestions.

The result of this communication has been translated into policies that benefit investors, the business community and the general public.

For example, the investing community had voiced its concerns on the two-tier exit levy introduced in February this year. It has been simplified to a flat 10 per cent levy from Sept 21.

But this is not the only instance in which the Government has "listened" and acted on concerns, suggestions and views expressed and made known to it.

The views of the private sector, the business community - both local and foreign - the unions, journalists, bankers, stockbrokers, have been taken into account for many years in formulating the annual Federal Government Budget.

The Finance Minister holds pre-Budget dialogues with a cross-section of society over several days. The Budget which is tabled in Parliament is a document which takes into account the collective views of a cross-section of society - Malaysians and foreigners.

The Minister of International Trade and Industry too has a dialogue with the private sector on matters and issues relating to trade and investment.

But this private-public sector dialogue is not confined or limited to the two Ministries. It extends to a whole spectrum of national activities.

Malaysian policies are drawn up after consultations with representatives from a cross-section of society. More recently, the 155-member National Economic Consultative Council II was launched to evaluate the performance of the National Development Policy and to make recommendations for a new policy to steer national development beyond the year 2000.

Tun Daim Zainuddin, in his capacity as Minister with Special Functions, has continued to "lend both his ears" to the business community and fund managers. He continues to meet representatives to listen and hear views and get feedback on government policies and their impact on the business community, fund managers and analysts.

The Government continues to seek additional avenues and sections of

society for feedback. It has demonstrated its "business-friendly" and "people-friendly" approach in numerous other ways.

In the Third National Smart Partnership Dialogue on "Youth in National Development: The Challenges Ahead" over the weekend, Noorhamimah and several others spoke of the need for the authorities to communicate with the youth.

The weekend dialogue organised by MIGHT (Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology), students and senior government officials, including the Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Halim Ali, "listened and dialogued".

The youth, the future leaders, provided valuable feedback on how communication with them could be improved. They felt that efforts needed to be made to increase dialogue with students.

They noted that ministers meet Malaysian students abroad and hold discussions and dialogues with them and urged that similar sessions be held with students at home.

This, they suggested, should be extended to cover those in the rural areas and in other parts of the country and not just in major towns. Youth organisations, away from the "bright city lights", also have views and opinions that need ears.

They pointed out that if the youth, the future leaders of the country, are to support and lend a helping hand in the implementation of policies, they must first understand the policies.

Currently, they said, there is a "communication gap" which needs to be dealt with and narrowed.

One of them suggested that the Ministry of Culture and Youth organise dialogues with the youth along the lines of the pre-Budget dialogues by the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

It will be an additional avenue for the youth and the authorities to "listen and hear" each other's views on various issues, subjects and policies.

The students stressed that the youth, who account for a large proportion of society and are future leaders, could be more useful and helpful if only they were better informed of the policies and plans.

"Trust us," they said and "you will not be disappointed."

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