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He heeds young voices too

HERE are some excerpts from our chat with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Though you weren't there to share that unforgettable morning with us, we'd like to let you peek into some of our future Prime Minister's thoughts.

On being a Malaysian

"What is a true Malaysian? You might go abroad to study. Say, London. If I were to meet you there, how would I know you were Malaysian? Even if you were in a baju kurung, you could be a Bruneian. I always ask myself this question. Look at the Japanese. You can tell their nationality by their behaviour. They bow three times. You can tell them apart from the Chinese. But I have yet to distinguish the Malaysian. Entahlah.

"I experienced a touching encounter in China. It was at a party organised by the embassy in Beijing. There was a group of students who sang in Bahasa Malaysia - not in Chinese and not English. They had composed their own lyrics, and they sang it to the tune of Jamal Abdillah's *Masihkah kau ingat?* It went something like this:

"Do you remember/ back in our village/ the padi fields, eating durians/ I miss my country...". The crowd of 300 gave them a standing ovation. When I met them later, I asked where they had studied in Malaysia.

"Imagine my surprise when they told me that they had attended Chinese-medium schools. I used to think that if we put Chinese in Chinese-medium schools, we were in danger of making them less Malaysian. This is the same for Malays and Indians. But this experience made me realise that you can be Malaysian if you are brought up to think like a Malaysian. If we can do that, we can create our own identity.

"Past leaders like Tengku Abdul Rahman and Tun Hussein Onn have done so much to make Malaysia a country all Malaysians can be proud of. Many years ago, it was not easy to get all Malaysians to cheer for our football team. There was a tendency for some to identify with teams that came from their country of origin. It is heartwarming to see this has changed, this was especially evident at the first SEA Games."

Past efforts

"Try to make every effort to have a friend from every community. When I was the director of youth, I asked some students to tell me if they had a Chinese or Malay or Indian friend. I was saddened to hear that they did not have friends from another community.

"They stuck to their own race. So I gave them numbers: 1, 2 and 3, then mixed them up. They had to interact with one another by playing games and organising activities. I conducted an evaluation before the end of the training session, and was pleasantly surprised when they told me they were happy that they had made new friends.

"I am glad to hear that the points system (for extra-curricular activities) is still being practised. As Education Minister in 1984, I wanted to make ECA compulsory because you learn how to work and interact with others as well as develop team spirit outside the classroom. Points are given to those who participate in these activities. You see, the top academic student is not necessarily the best student."

Future plans

"I have proposed a few ideas to the Ministry of Education, but they have yet to be implemented. One of them is a twinning arrangement between national-type schools and national schools. Under this plan, students from

these schools will meet two or three times a year to participate in games.

"Another programme is a twinning programme between urban and rural schools. Some city kids have never been to a rambutan or durian orchard. Some have never held a chick in their palm. Ever walked in a padi field? These are all rich experiences."

Young people count

"I want your ideas!" That's what Pak Lah told 18 surprised young people at his office in Putrajaya last Friday. Now, it's not everyday a political leader wants to know what small fry like us think, let alone give him suggestions on how to run the country!

Well, running the country may be a slight exaggeration but he did ask them to share with him their ideas on how to improve national unity. How about that!

"I'm always looking for ideas to improve race relations."

His sincerity was all the more evident when he asked the students (who came from as far as Kedah in the north and Marudi in Sarawak) to come up with a wish list - telling him what they wanted from their soon-to-be Prime Minister!

Goodbye, Dr Mahathir

HI everyone, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's last day in office is Oct 31. He would have served 22 years. Here's a chance for you to tell him what you'll remember him for, most of all.

It has to be a single incident that has had a profound impact on you - whether it's learning mathematics and science in English or checking in your baggage at KL Sentral (as opposed to hauling it all the way to KLIA), or giving you a vision to work towards.

Hello, Pak Lah!

DEPUTY Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has asked YOU, yes, you, the average Malaysian teen, to send him a wish list. What would you ask for, if he could fulfil it? Bring more rock concerts to Malaysia? Set up a one-stop volunteer centre so anyone can chip in their services? Tell us!

The deadline for both topics is 10am on Oct 28. E-mail your entries to [yquake@nstp.com.my](mailto:yquake@nstp.com.my) or send them to YouthQuake - Dr M/ Pak Lah, New Straits Times, 31 Jalan Riong, 59100 Kuala Lumpur.