

COMMENT | Mr Prime Minister, acts of kindness begin at home

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COMMENT | Mr Prime Minister,

Malaysians watched you over television last night, and understandably, you were peeved and expressed disappointment and sadness over the backlash from some parties against the government's move to bring injured Palestinians from Gaza to receive medical treatment in Malaysia.

Some, you said, even went to extremes in criticising the noble effort when it was just a small act of compassion and kindness towards the Palestinian people who have been suffering and enduring Israel's genocidal acts in Gaza.

When the government brought the injured for medical treatment, some people criticised them, saying they should not be the prime minister of Malaysia telling them to go be the prime minister of Palestine if they really wanted to help.

Like most Malaysians, I am in solidarity with oppressed groups. But I admit that I am one of those who disagree with what you consider a noble deed.

But do not get me wrong. Lest I am accused of being indifferent and apathetic to human sufferings, let me declare that I empathise with the miseries of fellow human beings who are victims of strife, war, and other calamities.

Regardless of their colour, creed, or religion, they deserve help, and I have spoken out against the lack of sympathy and understanding of their plight.

No glory being first

In your chest-thumping speech, you declared: “We are the first country in Asia that has brought in injured Palestinians for treatment.”

So what? It is no use being the first when students in Sabah must climb trees to get an internet connection to do their school work.

It may be a “feel good” sensation for Malaysia to outdo more than a dozen Arab nations that have refused to allow entry for those running away from the ravages of war in the Gaza Strip.

There is no glory in being the first, anyway. What purpose does it serve when the people in your backyard - fellow Malaysians need help – more than foreigners?

Maybe the people around you only tell you what you like to hear. Hence, you are

not aware of the actual situation on the ground.

Why don't you start by visiting our public hospitals and talk to Malaysians who have to wait for months for medical treatment?

Long waits

The results may stump you. The wards are full, and it is a long wait to see a doctor for treatment.

Malaysians cannot get beds and treatment and have to wait for months to see specialists for consultation. In urgent and critical cases, beds in emergency rooms are being used as a stopgap measure.

It takes at least four months to get an appointment for a computed tomography (CT) scan in a government hospital. Those referred for rehabilitation for lung and chest problems must wait even longer.

When seeking an appointment, hospitals say: "We will call you in two months and give you a date."

Do you know how many applications are made each year for government scholarships for tertiary education?

Only a tiny fraction succeeds. Others opt for the National Higher Education Fund Corporation education loan scheme or apply for bank loans.

And yet, tuition fees for Palestinians in public universities in Malaysia have been waived for a year.

Then, Higher Education Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin said last November that the ministry would also hold talks with private universities to waive the fees for more than 200 Palestinian students studying at these institutions for one year.

“We are also considering providing monthly allowances to all 800 Palestinian students (in both public and private universities) in Malaysia for the same period,” Bernama quoted him as saying.

Misplaced priority

The government appears to give preferences and urgent treatment to foreigners who have never contributed to the country's welfare, taxation, sacrifice, and development.

The Madani government may outscore its rivals in brownie points and show whose shade of green is brighter.

Besides a misplaced priority, it comes at a cost.

No one will have any qualms about being compassionate and sympathetic to the Palestinians. But Malaysians must always come first.

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