

Remembered for his humility

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. He was the third Prime Minister of the country, an undisputedly great man who, in his lifetime, left an indelible mark on many Malaysians.

But what struck family members, friends, colleagues and others was his humility.

Today, during the launch of a memorial built in his memory, they recalled fondly how Tun Hussein Onn, Prime Minister from 1976 to 1981, had touched their lives.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said what he remembered most about Hussein was how down-to-earth he was.

"He was very humble. When he appointed me Federal Territory Ministry parliamentary secretary, he apologised because he could not offer me a higher post.

"That shows how humble he was. He need not have apologised," he said at the launch of Memorial Tun Hussein Onn, housed within the old Prime Minister's Department in Jalan Dato' Onn.

Abdullah related another incident that had stayed with him all these years. "Hussein once approached me and said he intended to make me Deputy Federal Territory Minister.

"Three months later, there were still no developments. I didn't, however, bring it up or remind him of his promise. One day, after an Umno supreme council meeting, Hussein walked up to me and apologised. He said 'I spoke to you about it but I haven't done it'.

"I jokingly replied 'I was wondering whether you had forgotten'.

"He said he would keep his promise. This demonstrates once again how humble he was."

Hussein, recalled Abdullah, was also very patient and would listen to the views of others without interrupting even though the person spoke at length.

"If he calls for a meeting, you better be prepared for a long one. He could go on for four or five hours without a break."

Abdullah said Hussein had unconventional ideas and he "thought differently" from others.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein spoke on behalf of his mother, siblings and other family members and thanked the Government for building a memorial in honour of his father.

An emotional Hishammuddin said it was not easy for him to speak about his father.

"This is the first time I am speaking about him since his death 16 years ago. He was a humble, principled and modest man."

Hishammuddin said he found it difficult to view his father's personal belongings at the memorial.

"I asked for the items in the memorial to be videotaped. It is easier for me to view his personal effects — his pen, spectacles and others — on TV."

Hishammuddin's brother Datuk Haris Hussein said his father continued to have a profound presence in the family.

"What we do is always based on the principles he has imparted, either through action or words, to us.

"We are guided by him. Everything we do is also always for the family."

Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said Hussein had moulded many Malaysian leaders.

He urged Malaysians to visit the memorial, which houses 16,000 artifacts on Hussein.

The National Archives gathered the materials from various sources including family, close friends and individuals related to Hussein.

Abdullah also launched a book called Tun Hussein Onn: Father of Unity.

Hishammuddin looks back

On his father's legacy

"It's in the blood, and the most important thing that we have been brought up with is the family name.

"When you talk about the family name, it embodies everything he believed in and the key values that he always did not compromise on. Honesty, free from corruption, unity and putting the interest of others above his own. Those, to me, are values which cannot be shown just by artifacts in a memorial but in the way he conducted himself.

"From the memorial, you will see the very modest way in which he led his life. I hope the younger generation takes time not only to look at the artifacts but to understand what was behind the man."

On what the commemoration means to him as a son, and a current member of the Government

"For any leader, his leadership will be judged not during the time he is serving, but by history. So in my father's case, the fact that he passed away so long ago, and retired even earlier, this memorial is a reflection of his leadership and the people's recognition of his sacrifices when he was alive.

"As a son, that means a lot to me because when you are in power, people will all be agreeing with your policies, proposals and leadership.

"That agreement and support will only be tested when you are no longer around.

"So the fact that they are giving this memorial, and my father is no longer here, means a lot

to us because it is a reflection of the respect given by the Government and people without any other interest but for him and his legacy."

Source:

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