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All can learn lessons on integrity from Mr Clean

Address by Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah at the launch of the book *Being Abdullah Badawi* at the Sime Darby Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur on Oct 31

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When Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi became prime minister in 2003, political commentators said that he had very big shoes to fill. He was taking over from a man who had led the country for 22 years, during which Malaysia was transformed from an agrarian backwater to a modern, emerging economy. He had a tough act to follow.

Malaysians looked towards the change in leadership both with trepidation and high expectations. The previous two decades had seen rapid industrialisation and infrastructure development. The slowdown in the West, in particular the United States, Japan and Europe, saw investor focus divert to the "Asian tigers" — Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong — and the emerging economies such as Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Malaysia had also taken an important role on the world stage through Asean, the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and until the Asian financial crisis, saw its economy grow at close to double-digit rates for a sustained period.

Then came the Asian financial crisis and with it, regional political turmoil and instability. Five years later, just as Malaysia and the region started coming out of this crisis, Tun Abdullah took over the mantle of the country's leadership. Barely months later, in 2004, he led his party to the biggest ever election victory in the history of the country.

The book that is being launched today — and it is my pleasure to officiate at this launch — lays out the Abdullah Badawi years, in particular, his policies and programmes, his trials and tribulations, during the 5½ years that he led the country. Much newsprint and cloud space have been devoted to the early years of his leadership but please allow me to digress a little and dwell on what, I believe, people consistently seek in a consistently changing world.

People everywhere, I believe, want the same thing — whether they are citizens of a developed western state; whether they are in an emerging economy; or whether they are in a strife-torn Third-World backwater — they all want a leadership with integrity that will improve their lives and make their tomorrows better than their yesterdays. I would like to draw parallels from the ongoing US presidential election campaign, which opens up an interesting debate on the kind of leadership that the world's most powerful democracy wants. In all three widely-watched presidential debates, the question of integrity, honesty and moral courage was raised by both candidates. If we put aside the insults and backbiting, what do we have?

What we have is that for 240 years, Americans — in what is perceived as the world's greatest functioning democracy — have always gone to the polls, choosing a president whom they believed had more integrity, honesty and moral courage than his opponent. It is not an exact science and America, too, has, at times, made the wrong choice. But these occasions are rare and there are safeguards within the system. Nevertheless, as Americans go to the polls next week, again, as in the last 57 presidential elections, the issues of integrity, honesty and moral courage would be foremost on the minds of the majority of voters.

I would like to draw attention to what President Dwight D Eisenhower once said: "The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably, integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office."

And I would be remiss if I did not also quote our founding father, Yang Teramat Mulia Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, who said: "If you think you are rich, there are many who are richer

than you. If you think you are clever, there are more people cleverer than you. But if you think you are honest, then you are among the few and in this instance, it is best to be among the few."

Looking at the quotes of these two great leaders, we can better understand why Tun Abdullah received the resounding support he did when he went to the polls in 2004. The people of Malaysia wanted, and will continue to want, just like their fellow citizens of the world, a leader with moral courage, honesty, and most of all, integrity.

One of the first things Tun Abdullah did as prime minister was to set up the Malaysian Institute of Integrity in March 2004. The institute's role is to facilitate the aims and objectives of the National Integrity Plan (NIP), which seeks to develop a nation that has high integrity, is resilient and that embraces universal good values.

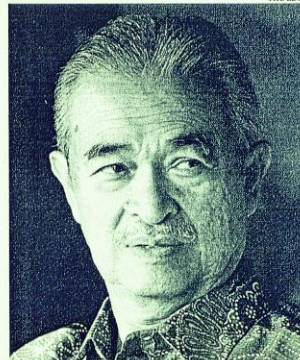
He also sought to set up a Royal Commission on Police, though resistance led to it being watered down to what is now called Suruhanjaya Integriti Agensi Penguatkuasaan or the EAIC — the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission. Tun Abdullah also sought to strengthen what was formerly known as the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) by empowering it further to become the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

He came into office with an image as Mr Nice Guy and Mr Clean. His early efforts, such as the setting up of the Institute of Integrity and his National Integrity Plan, struck a chord with voters and the ordinary man on the street. The accounts of the measures taken by Tun Abdullah are well documented by the writer, Datuk Wong Sulong, and take the reader through the difficulties of leadership, especially in a multi-racial and multi-religious country like Malaysia. A leader, especially a Malaysian leader, constantly walks a tight-rope.

In modern society, where cynicism abounds, the most difficult thing we will find as we read this book, is how Tun Abdullah sought to instil integrity within the system and how he tried to navigate the minefields while dealing with little Napoleons within the civil service and enforcement agencies and meeting resistance to change within the own ranks in his party. Tun Abdullah's dilemma is not peculiar only to political leadership. The lessons we learn from this book also apply to leadership at all levels. The same cynicism exists at all levels — whether it is about the monarchy, whether it is a sports organisation or a business empire — and it happens more frequently than we would like to admit.

In recent years, we have seen how once widely-heralded titans in the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (Fifa) were subjected to scorn because of the collapse of integrity; we saw how millions were impoverished by Bernard Madoff and Enron; we saw how the global financial infrastructure almost collapsed and tens of thousands of people lost their jobs and homes because of the greed and lack of integrity in global banks in the sub-prime scandal; and we saw how nations like Greece almost collapsed and had to be bailed out.

Lack of integrity has disastrous consequences as can be seen in the uprising, or what came to be known as the Arab Spring, in West Asia and closer to home, the uprisings in Indonesia and the people power movement which led to the fall of the once powerful Marcos regime in the Philippines. Most of these countries have still not recovered and today, we see Venezue-



Abdullah took over from Dr Mahathir — who served as premier for 22 years — in 2003 before making way for Datuk Seri Najib Razaki in 2009

la, once one of the wealthiest countries in the world, facing food shortages and a breakdown in the system.

We see gutting images of young, high-flying professionals, carrying their cardboard boxes and walking into the streets jobless; we see heart-rending images of refugees from failed states, drowning within sight of the beaches of the promised land they sought to flee to; and we read of able-bodied men and women begging in the streets or ending their lives because their future appeared so bleak. These events are fresh in our minds but history will show us that what is happening today is not new. It has happened since the advent of time. Great empires and great civilisations have similarly collapsed. And if we go to the root cause of why a community or a nation succeeds or fails, it always comes to one issue — integrity or the lack of it.

A nation's survival, and its success, therefore, depend on integrity at all levels and most crucially, at its leadership and that is what Tun Abdullah sought to achieve when he came into office. It is an issue which we will always have to face as can be seen by what is happening in countries far more advanced and developed than us such as the United States of America. We will continue to do well as long as there are more people of integrity amongst us than those without.

What exactly is integrity? There are many interpretations by thinkers, academics and philosophers. One academic describes integrity as the consistency between what a leader says and what the leader does. It's an alignment between a person's values, beliefs, words and actions, as well as the extent to which promises are kept.

Integrity, according to this academic, is also perceived to be closely related to honesty, trustworthiness and fairness and is frequently thought to be a measure of good moral character. Finally, he says, integrity is judged by how closely the leader's behaviour and actions are consistent with the moral frameworks of a community and/or organisation.

Two things which come to mind when Tun Abdullah became Prime Minister were his taglines of "walking the talk" and being "leader of all Malaysians". These promises resonated with the rakyat and they showed their approval at the ballot box. It is interesting to note that Democrat presidential candidate Hillary Clinton also uses the same

tagline — to be president of all Americans if she is elected.

Much water has passed under the bridge. Tun Abdullah notched up his successes and he is frank about where he misjudged and where he made mistakes. There is much to learn from this book, and learn we should, so that we can carry on the good things and avoid the pitfalls. I have often quoted the famous philosopher George Santayana who said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Hence, I take this opportunity to applaud and thank Tun Abdullah for his frankness and honesty in sharing his thoughts because we can all learn from his experiences.

In conclusion, I would like to relate two lessons we can learn — one from the celebrated short story *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* by Ursula Le Guin and the other, from the reasons Tun Abdullah cites for resigning as Prime Minister. Ursula Le Guin writes about the Utopian village called Omelas where everyone is happy and prosperous. But there is a dark secret behind this Utopian joy. In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, there is a room where a feeble-minded child is locked up permanently.

The people of Omelas all know the child is there. But it is said, and widely believed, that their happiness, their prosperity and their health depend wholly on this child's abominable misery. So what do they do? There are some who are outraged; but they all do nothing because if the child were to be freed, all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms.

As time goes by, even those who are unhappy about this locked-up child, justify their inaction by starting to believe that even if the child could be released, it is too degraded to know any real joy. So they begin to accept their own happiness and forget the child's misery. But the story does not end there.

At times, one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage; does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home. These people keep walking straight out of the city of Omelas, through its beautiful gates. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back though the place they go to is not the Utopia they are leaving. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.

The lesson here is that you have to stand up for what's right; even if you are standing alone. That kind of integrity, to me, is what we should all strive for. That can only make us a stronger and better people.

The other lesson documented in this book is of the final months when there was pressure for Tun Abdullah to resign after the poor showing of his party in the 2008 general election. He was faced with two choices — to fight and remain in office as some of his supporters wanted, or to step down and make way for his successor.

His reasons for resigning, as he himself states, were simple — he could face off his challengers in a bitter fight and probably win through the power of his incumbency. But had he done that, he would have inherited, had he won, or he would have left behind, had he lost, a fractured and divided nation and party; a party, of which his late grandfather Syeikh Abdullah Fahim and his father Ahmad Badawi were pioneers; and a country to which he had sworn loyalty. Therefore, he chose to resign.

I end with this phrase from the book, *The Well of Ascension* by Brandon Sanderson: "Good men don't become legends," he said quietly, good men don't need to become legends." She opened her eyes, looking up at him. "They just do what's right anyway."