

Late Arshad Ayub a true educator-leader who walked the talk

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SINCE the demise of Tun Arshad Ayub, Malaysia's renowned education hero, many suggestions have been made to remember his large and unique legacy.

Renaming UiTM (Universiti Teknologi Mara) seems to be among the favourites thus far.

His name is almost synonymous with the institution long before it achieved a university status. In fact, then it was hardly noticed when it first took foot as a training college meant for rural development in the 1950s.

Beginning with little known Dewan Latihan Rida (Rural Industry Development Authority) to train small-scale rural en-

trepreneurs, it developed into Maktab Mara to produce human resources in various fields to meet the demands of nation-building, particularly just after Merdeka in the early 1960s onwards.

The acronym Mara for Majlis Amanah Rakyat was unheard of then. Meaning to say that Arshad was undisputedly the person who gave birth to the Mara Institute of Technology or later known as ITM.

From then on, ITM is Arshad, and vice-versa. Many generations who were associated with ITM knew Arshad to be the person who helmed and built ITM.

Needless to say, there are more than one versions of the story depending on the sources.

But, invariably they are told with some degree of fondness and nostalgia of how Arshad laid a firm foundation in bringing up a new breed of citizens who have suffered much from the colonial rule.

A rule that did not go beyond "educating" them to be "better"

fishermen and rural dwellers. Only the very selected few were made to be elites beholden to the colonial masters' wishes and wants.

Arshad was supposed to repress this notably during the tenure of the second prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak, himself an inspiration to Arshad.

No doubt the two teamed well together allowing for the growth of ITM as a bastion of lost generations in forging a promising future ahead.

Arshad took the bull by the horns, sparing no effort in ensuring that rural segments of the population were not left out. The tagline "no one left behind" (NOLB) was not fashionable then, but Arshad put it in place ahead of its time.

Although a small band of disgruntled chauvinists deemed this discriminatory, if not a racist, move, to Arshad it mattered not.

In contrast, he garnered support from a multi-racial group of professionals who were comfort-

able in delivering NOLB against all odds.

Through this, what made Arshad stand out is that he did not easily mince his words when it came to the question of principles and ethics. Indeed, he followed through with convincing actions in translating words into reality.

Something that is a rarity among leadership circles, particularly in the education sector.

For someone who started from ground zero without much formal training in education per se, Arshad moved up the ladder of leadership in education by truly believing that education remains top priority to contribute to the nation's progress, as he also held fast to what all human beings can do.

In fact, what he did almost single-handedly (due to the paucity of professional assistance then) was to boldly undertake the uncharted path of introducing ideas that were not popular then to change mindsets and behaviours.

He was among the first to introduce foreign languages as being compulsory. Also the introduction of counselling and guidance services to help students seek proper grooming and personality development throughout their studies.

He is not one who takes the "play safe" attitude that many are inclined to today for the sake of self-preservation, even at the expense of the student population.

In other words, what Arshad did was ahead of his time, and that time is now back today with a vengeance of the pandemic.

What he prescribed for an institution decades ago is currently more than relevant for the nation if not the world at large.

Simply put, Arshad belongs to all Malaysians, as a true educator-leader whose wisdom will be missed by all with a commitment that surpasses most. May his soul be forever blessed.

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