

Continuing Dr Ismail's legacy

PM: The late statesman's contributions a guide for the current generation

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KUALA LUMPUR: The nation's second deputy prime minister Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman passed away 50 years ago yesterday. Despite his passing, his legacy of wanting to see a united and robust Malaysia would not be forgotten.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim recalled his fond memories of Dr Ismail, saying he was a "commanding" leader who was feared by all and willing to impart knowledge.

"Tun Ismail's style was assertive. When I was still a student leader, I met him at his home after a demonstration. He was very interested in the programme involving graduates and youths at that time.

"I was in the National Union Of Malaysian Muslim Students (PKPIM) and not many people knew me then. So I used to speak in an assertive tone because otherwise, other student leaders might say that I chickened out and softened my stance when meeting ministers.

"So in my speech with other ministers including Tun Razak (Hussein), I was still quite daring to voice out. But when facing Tun Ismail, I had to soften my language and speech because I feared him," he said at a ceremony to commemorate the late deputy prime minister at Dataran



Honouring a legend: (from left) Siti Nur Aishah Abdul Rahman, 25, L. Parames, 31, and Sandra Go, 23, visiting an exhibition at a ceremony to commemorate nationalist Dr Ismail who had been instrumental in governance and national unity. - AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

Merdeka here yesterday.

Anwar said that once the meeting was over, Dr Ismail called him over and gave him words of encouragement.

"At that time, we university students were demonstrating about the national language. We wanted our government to be strict in empowering our own language and our youths to master the national language. He took the time and explained to me why the shift in language usage was important. That was the difference of a

statesman who recognised a youth who had ideas," Anwar added.

Dr Ismail was among the key negotiators of Malaysia's independence. In the aftermath of the May 13, 1969 riots, he and the then prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein charted a roadmap for a wounded nation.

Anwar was speaking at the event to celebrate Dr Ismail's vision and contribution to national unity called The Commemoration of Statesman Tun Dr Ismail Al-Haj: Pillar of National Unity in

conjunction with the National Month celebration.

Also present at the ceremony were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof, Communications and Digital Minister Fahmi Fadzil, National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali and Dr Ismail's son Tawfik and other close family members.

Calling Dr Ismail the Pillar of National Unity, Anwar said that although Dr Ismail was born into

a well-off family and trained as a doctor at the University of Melbourne, his compassion for the underprivileged was apparent.

"He never showed off when talking about national policy, urban and rural development. This is what should be pondered upon by the youths now.

"He had a clear policy, which was to develop the country, push for growth, save the country and give hope to every citizen, whether Malay, Chinese, Indian or people in Sabah and Sarawak."

Anwar noted that the ceremony to commemorate the contributions of Dr Ismail was not just talk or for nostalgic reasons, but to serve as a guide for the current generation.

"We want to revive the idealism, message and strict principles that Tun Dr Ismail brought, his sacred voice in laying the foundation to save the nation so that we will live harmoniously as a big Malaysia family," he added.

Earlier, at the start of the event, Anwar and everyone present stood up to recite the Rukun Negara, of which Dr Ismail was among the important figures who conceived the five principles.