



On the beat

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MINISTER Hannah Yeoh did something unique recently by turning up ahead of an event's scheduled start and getting straight to the point.

Upon entering the packed venue of the townhall talk with sports industry players, she found the first three rows reserved for the ministry's heads of departments.

The Youth and Sports Minister then did the unexpected by inviting participants who had been forced to stand at the back to move forward to fill the front rows.

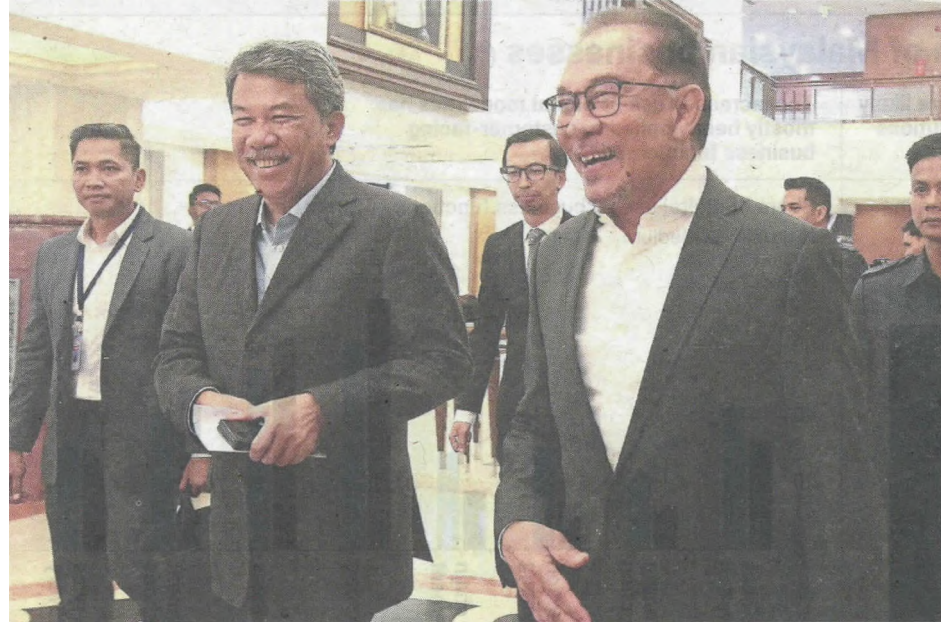
The civil servants vacated their seats and sat behind Yeoh, who then went on to moderate the session herself.

The stakeholders included gym owners, tournament organisers, coaches, and sports science and medicine practitioners.

No time was wasted in the no-frills meeting. The routine fanfare associated with functions to welcome invited VIPs was unceremoniously discarded.

Passé protocols

It's 2023, yet we embrace archaic practices more relevant in history books.



Setting a casual tone: A tie-less Anwar (right) and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan on their way to the first session of the 15th Parliament on Dec 20.
— AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star

While Yeoh preferred to play down her actions, a video of what happened is making its rounds on social media.

When she was appointed to the job, she also gave a standing order that officials need not wait as a welcoming committee to greet her at functions.

These officials certainly have bigger fish to fry than join politicians in the entourages that seem to follow them everywhere they go.

There may be a necessity for a few officials to accompany a minister to answer questions or record issues requiring follow-up action, but the perception, arguably, is that these politicians crave a sense of self-importance and authority.

To put it bluntly, it merely inflates their egos and encourages

delusions of grandeur.

We hope Yeoh's practice will continue and won't just be a case of a new broom sweeping clean.

Haven't we seen newly elected YBs post pictures of themselves travelling in economy class but then slowly getting used to being in business class, even for a short trip?

When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim decided to do away with the tie, he sent a powerful message of being someone who wants to get down to business and be hands on.

Here was someone who had no time for ornamental fripperies, as one report put it.

The more conventional gentlemen would say wearing a suit without a tie seems incomplete - even naked.

But I'm glad that the less formal

and dress-down trend has taken off. We are emulating what the Singapore Parliament did long ago, allowing their male ministers and MPs to choose to wear a shirt without a jacket.

The tie-less approach has also been adopted at the Australian House of Representatives and Senate.

But more importantly, we need to create a new culture. Can the PM send a message down that there's no need for a bunga mangga, kompang, silat and lion dance welcome unless there's a festive element involved?

Not only is time wasted but funds are unnecessarily used, too, even if they are relatively paltry sums.

Malaysians should also dispense with the obligatory salutations by a speaker addressing

titles and naming the important guests present. By the time the names of every Tan Sri, Puan Sri, Datuk Seri, Datin Seri, Datuk-Datuk and Datin-Datin are addressed, at least five to 10 minutes have gone by.

It also makes the untitled guests feel less important, which should never be the case.

Worse, it reaffirms the perception that Malaysia is probably the country with the greatest number of titled people. Police reports have been made of impostors who brazenly crow about their titles when they, in fact, have none.

Many African countries have stopped such long salutations and their speakers simply start their speeches or remarks with the standard, "Ladies and gentlemen, all the rules of decorum have been observed" or "Honourable delegates, distinguished ladies and gentlemen".

Of course, protocols need to be observed and upheld when royalty is invited to grace events.

Finally, we should do away with having to hand VIPs gifts, which is a very Malaysian way of thanking guests. However, there's a common fate that befalls these cendramata - they all end up gathering dust in some corner of the ministry's offices.

The better ones, of course, end up in the minister's office and, sometimes, the waiting room, but we can only guess where the unwanted ones go.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as the PM of the Pakatan Harapan government after the 14th General Election in 2018, suggested that fruits, flowers and food be given instead.

But when a minister has at least four to five functions a day, what is the YB going to do with all these items with a limited shelf-life?

No wonder his idea didn't take off, it was simply impractical.

These entrenched exercises in protocol will not disappear overnight, but gradual changes need to be made now.