

Abdullah's legacy of ethical governance, human capital development

KUALA LUMPUR: Former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's legacy in economic and national development provides valuable lessons in promoting ethical governance, inclusivity and growing human capital.

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Malaysian Academy of SME and Entrepreneurship Development coordinator Dr Mohamad Idham Md Razak said Abdullah stood out for his emphasis on human-centric leadership.

"His vision of development extended beyond material prosperity.

"Through the concepts of Islam Hadhari and human capital development, he championed moral, spiritual and intellectual advancement alongside economic progress," he told the *New Straits Times*.

He said Islam Hadhari aimed to embed Islamic principles such as

justice, knowledge and accountability into national governance, ensuring economic growth did not come at the expense of ethics.

"His approach marked him as a leader who valued sustainable and inclusive growth over short-term gains, leaving a lasting imprint on Malaysia's socioeconomic direction."

Abdullah, 85, died on Monday at the National Heart Institute after battling illness.

He is remembered for spearheading civil service reforms, enhancing anti-corruption initiatives and promoting moderate Islamic values.

Idham said Abdullah placed strong emphasis on human capital development, particularly through education reform and vocational training, to prepare Malaysians for a knowledge-based economy.

"By advocating public-private

partnerships and ethical governance, his administration laid a foundation for long-term, equitable growth, while maintaining fiscal responsibility."

UiTM Puncak Alam Faculty of Business Management acting dean Associate Professor Dr Masturah Ma'in said Abdullah's economic contributions during his tenure were significant.

These included major regional development initiatives such as Iskandar Malaysia, the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) and the East Coast Economic Region (ECER).

"These projects were key to unlocking the potential of underdeveloped regions by attracting investment, enhancing infrastructure and creating employment opportunities," she said.

She said Iskandar Malaysia evolved into a major investment hub that bolstered Malaysia's

economic links with Singapore and boosted sectors like logistics, tourism and education.

"NCER and ECER aimed to uplift northern and eastern states through agro-industrial and energy projects, helping to address regional disparities.

"Although there were challenges in implementation, these initiatives reflected strategic foresight in encouraging geographically balanced development.

"Pak Lah's corridor-based growth model remains relevant today as Malaysia looks to revitalise underperforming regions and foster inclusive prosperity."

Masturah said leaders today could draw inspiration from Abdullah's focus on human capital and fair economic policy.

"That focus underscores the reality that sustainable development hinges on investing in people, not just infrastructure.

"His regional corridor strategic illustrates the value of decentralising growth to avoid deepening the urban-rural divide.

"Furthermore, his unwavering commitment to Islam Hadhari - which prioritised transparency, accountability and moral governance - offers a blueprint for restoring public confidence in national institutions."

Idham highlighted Abdullah' often criticised emphasis on agriculture, which has proven prescient amid current concern about global food security.

"Back then, many dismissed his focus on agriculture as a step backwards. But today, in the face of global food supply issues, we recognise it was a crucial pillar for national resilience."

He said Abdullah's passing marked the loss of a leader who embodied moderation, humility and inclusiveness.