

FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS

Remembering the quiet impact of Pak Lah's leadership

HE is the only prime minister I've ever shaken hands with. It was 2004, and I was a young lecturer — ambitious, uncertain and just beginning to find my footing in academia.

I had volunteered to help organise an international conference, more for the experience than anything else.

On the day of the opening ceremony, as the guest of honour arrived, there he was: Malaysia's fifth prime minister, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He stepped out of the car with a calm presence, gentle smile and the kind of warmth that didn't require speeches or slogans. And then, we shook hands.

It was a brief moment — polite, formal, as expected in these events. But as news of his passing fills my screen, that memory surfaces with unexpected weight.

I find myself returning to that simple gesture, and the quiet man behind it.

Tun Abdullah Badawi, or Pak Lah, as many affectionately called him, was never the loudest voice in the room.

In a political landscape often



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driven by volume and bravado, he offered a different kind of leadership — thoughtful, measured, soft-spoken.

I've come to believe that his quietness was not a lack, but a strength.

Looking back, I think that handshake stayed with me not because it was with a prime minister, but because it marked the first time I met someone who embodied a value I've come to hold close: to be of benefit to others.

Prophet Muhammad once said, "The best of people are those who bring the most benefit to others" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). Pak Lah, in many ways, exemplified this.

His tenure as prime minister may not have been the most dramatic, but it was defined by a

sincere attempt to build, to nurture and to serve — for the good of others.

I don't think I fully appreciated it then. At that time, I was more interested in papers, presentations and figuring out where the coffee breaks were.

But over the years, that moment kept coming back to me — especially during moments of doubt. Am I doing enough? Is my work meaningful? Does any of this matter?

And somehow, the answer kept circling back to that same idea: do good work and use it to do good for others.

It doesn't have to be big or heroic. You just need to pick a vocation, strive to be your best at it, and ask: who am I helping with this?

When someone like Pak Lah leaves us, we remember not just their positions, but their posture. Not just their achievements, but their attitude.

His kindness, humility and willingness to serve without needing the spotlight — those are the things that remain.

And perhaps that's the lesson I didn't realise I had learnt from



Outgoing prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi leaving the palace after a meeting with the king in Kuala Lumpur on April 2, 2009. The late Abdullah's kindness, humility and willingness to serve without needing the spotlight are the things that remain with
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our brief encounter. That being someone of benefit doesn't always come with applause or headlines.

Often, it's quiet. It's in the background. It's in the decision to lead with integrity even when it's unpopular. It's in showing up, doing the work and going home with a clear conscience.

In a world often dazzled by charisma and theatrics, his calm decency was refreshing. Reassuring, even. He reminded us that leadership can be gentle.

As we offer our prayers and condolences to his family, I find myself grateful.

Not just for his contributions to the country, but for that one small gesture — his outstretched hand to a young lecturer, who

didn't know then how much it would come to mean.

So if you're reading this and wondering how to move forward in your own journey — whether in your career, your relationships, or just in life — perhaps the answer is this: pick something you care about, give it your best and let it be of benefit to someone else.

You never know whose life you might quietly touch. Or what small, unassuming moment — like a handshake — might stay with them forever.

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