

PM envisages a selfless, kind nation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The Malaysia that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi envisages is a Malaysia that cares, that is selfless, that is kind and that is charitable.

"Whether it is tending to the terminally ill, or risking one's life and limb to pull a child out of a burning building, or giving one's life to assist a stranger under assault, the root of humanitarianism is the capacity to care for a fellow human being.

"The values that define this capacity — the spirit of caring, of selflessness, of kindness and of charity — are the values that I would like to see cultivated in our young today.

"We must not forget to uphold and develop these core values that make us humans and uniquely Malaysian," the Prime Minister said last night at the inaugural NSTP-PwC Young Humanitarian Award.

In an emotive speech which hushed the audience of top chief executives, non-governmental organisations and journalists, Abdullah spoke fondly about his youth "when Malaysia was a fledgling nation, tentatively finding its way in the world".

"We may not have had as many of life's luxuries compared to present-day Malaysia, but the milk of human kindness was certainly abundant," he said.

In his young days, it seemed that people had more time for one another and the pace of life was more leisurely and forgiving. Also, communities seemed to come together and assist one another.

"I say this not because I believe we should discount all our accomplishments of the past five decades.

"I say this because I feel that it would be a shame if we discard our humanity in our headlong chase for progress and material gain.

"As we travel this road, we should be mindful that each of us bears the responsibility to make ours a caring society.

"We have a responsibility to ourselves, as well as to our children to inculcate the fundamental principles of compassion and respect, and to help those who are less fortunate than us," he said.

Abdullah congratulated PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and the New Straits Times Press group of newspapers for organising an event which celebrated the contributions of the young, saying it was heartwarming to see that Malaysians had not forgotten those less fortunate than them.



GOOD WORKS RECOGNISED: Norlina kissing Abdullah's hand when she was announced as the winner of the inaugural NSTP-PwC Young Humanitarian Award 2003 last night. Raja Arshad (right) applauds.

"Society cannot be perfect, but society can certainly care for those who are less fortunate. We can try in our own humble way to make their lives better," he said.

Abdullah paid tribute to individual Malaysians, non-governmental organisations and corporations who committed their resources and fulfilled their social responsibilities by helping the less fortunate.

"The spirit of volunteerism, if nurtured and marshalled properly, can be a powerful force for good in society," he said.

Abdullah also touched on his favourite subject — a multi-cultural, multi-racial Malaysia, saying that truly humanitarian acts should transcend racial and societal barriers.

"It is not about the colour of your skin or your creed, but about the commitment to improve or enrich the lives of others and the welfare of humanity and society as a whole."

He said Malaysians should be inspired by the acts of charity and goodness of the recipients of the award, saying each Malaysian could make a difference.

"Cynics regard the saying 'one person can make a difference' as a trite and throwaway cliché, but there is a gentle and insistent truth to these words," he noted.

He later gave away prizes to the top three individuals nominated for the award.

They were selected from 35 nominations submitted by NGOs, NST readers and members of the public.

The winner of the award was Norlina Alwi, 32, and the other two were Adrian Lasimbang and Siva Saravana Kumar Gopal Dass.

Abdullah later met the families of the winners and thanked them for their selflessness and acts of charity. Some members of the families cried.

PwC executive chairman Datuk Raja Arshad Tun Uda said it had been a tough task in deciding the eventual winner and the panel of judges, led by former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam, had a difficult time.

Raja Arshad said young people who dedicated their lives to improving the lives of others deserved sim-

ilar recognition as those who excelled in other fields.

"When the aid is unconditional, without the expectation of any reward, then we can truly say that it is a selfless humanitarian act."

NSTP group editor-in-chief Datuk Kalimullah Hassan said they were encouraged by the greater awareness the award had created amongst young Malaysians.

He said PwC and NSTP would be expanding the awards next year to include organisations as well as individuals.

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