

COMMENT

Intellectuals in search of wisdom

WORTHY CAUSE: As distinguished scholars begin their quest for wisdom, we need to uphold our virtues, too

THINKING persons have always been in quest of virtues and wisdom. Philosophers and scholars have defined wisdom variously as follows: "Knowledge, discernment, insight of what is true or right coupled with just judgment."

Wisdom is regarded as a virtue among other virtues. Plato, later, Cicero (106-43 AD) and other religious and secular scholars, have regarded the cardinal virtues as "a habit of mind (*animi*) in harmony with reason and the order of nature: wisdom (*prudentiam*), justice, courage, temperance."

Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, noted: "The forms of virtue are justice, courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, wisdom."

Other scholars added "fortitude" and "piety". Cardinal virtues (*cardo-hinge*) are regarded as the basic virtues, required for a virtuous life. There are philosophical, educational, psychological, religious, academic discipline, conventional and the people perspectives of wisdom.

On Jan 10, Universiti Islam Malaysia (UIM) organised an International Convention on Wisdom on the theme of "Wisdom Harmonising the World". UIM is the first postgraduate university in Malaysia. On record, it is a tertiary institution established on Feb 22 in 1955 as Muslim College Malaysia (Kolej Islam Malaysia) before the University of Malaya moved from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur.

Established as an institution in the likes of International Islamic University, Islamic Science University, and other similar institutions, UIM had defined its existence by reference to its history, contributions and large alumni. Its establishment has obtained the approval of the Conference of Rulers.

At the helm, as president, is Tan

Sri Mohd Yusof Noor with vast experience in academia, as minister, as entrepreneur, with a team of dedicated, committed, impassioned religious leaders and academicians, with understanding of the meaning of partnership, collaboration and priorities.

One of the first acts of the university was to establish a Global Centre of Wisdom with the aim of wanting to contribute to world peace and human excellence and balanced civilisation development-elevating global wisdom. It is right judgment and fitting that, amidst all kinds of confusion in an age of unreason, disruption, distraction,

confusion and distraction, UIM should mobilise the world's academic and intellectual leaders to search for wisdom.

This search for knowledge and intelligence could generate a body of universal corpus of wisdom, which could guide human civilisation to overcome gaps and omissions in cumulative human knowledge and contradictions in values.

One telling contradiction raised by Yusof Noor is that "the majority

of educational policies all over the world today, tend to minimise the importance of all learning not directly related to science and technology, and consequently, eliminates humanistic and ethical subjects from the curriculum, one after another. Science and technical education have become the two major subjects of the school systems of all countries, developed and underdeveloped, thus making modern education extremely unbalanced..."

A gathering of 15 distinguished scholars from different societies and knowledge fields have begun the journey of focus on wisdom, beyond the dominance of scientific and technological intelligence.

There is the generation of corpus of wisdom and suggestion of the field of "Applied Wisdom". It is expected that universities in the nation and abroad will take cues from the initiative and work together in cooperation and collaborate in work on a worthy cause.

The worthiness of man is articulated as quoted by Yusof Noor by the resolution of the Conference of the International Association of University Presidents held in Boston: "Man is a unique and invaluable being, superior to everything else on earth. He is the master of history and civilisation, never-

theless, he is gradually and increasingly becoming enslaved by scientific, technological and a growth oriented material civilisation.

"Therefore, the society of man must be reconstructed on the principle of human centrism. No material, social mechanism, systems, and political institutions should be valued above human beings. Man cannot be utilised as a means to an end. Man must remain free to live an honourable and rewarding life, and free, to develop his innate creativity to the utmost."

Children and adults should grow not just based on evolving information and mature knowledge but founded on virtues, on *prudentiam* (or *phronesis* or *bijaksana*). The conventional wisdom can guide people well on the *Treasure Within* (Jacque Delors): learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

In the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, King Solomon is the Wise. In the ancient world, Socrates is considered wise, and, in the contemporary world, Nelson Mandela is considered wise. Typically, village elders are expected to be wise. Who are the wise in politics, education and society in Malaysia?

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