# Bringing wisdom back to educational institutions



By Dzulkifli Abdul Razak - December 30, 2021 @ 12:15am



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THE launch of Keluarga Malaysia by the prime minister some months ago resonates with Malaysians because we are, by and large, family-oriented.

That is, the family comes first – relationships are prioritised with care, and trust and respect are built.

Although these values have somewhat waned of late, the overall family structure is kept intact and still functional.

Eating together seems to be a good barometer of the "family-ness" level since food is central to the Malaysian lifestyle. Eating durian together, for example, used to reflect the spirit of *muhibbah* – on a wider social dimension.

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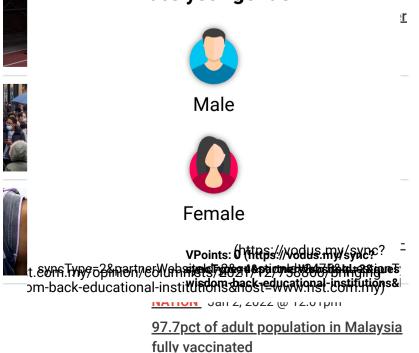
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Another is *gotong-royong*, a type of voluntary group work for the community's common good — from supporting a wedding ceremony to constructing communal infrastructure. This is especially so in rural areas.



Generally, such values have lost traction given the technological advances that are easily deployed. They are more efficient and readily accessible, but tend to be dehumanising as trust and relationships are not well attended to, thus reducing the level of "family-ness".

Most apparent is the intervention of Internet-related devices where faceto-face communication is put on hold or restricted.

In other words, the family culture is being distorted from time to time. The pandemic has put a great pressure on "family-ness" as people are forced to live apart during lockdowns.

Many have suffered mostly due to being unable to cope with being isolated from the family for a prolonged period.

The number of mental health cases has also increased. Adding to this are climate change issues that are affecting the whole world.

Be it in the Global North or South, the former suffered just as much as the latter and fared no better in terms of deaths and damage.

Worse when there is no family support available, especially in terms of providing socio-emotional support.

This is especially so for the ageing population, which is prevalent in the North where many are left to fend for themselves.

In such cases, there is no substitute for a high level of "family-ness", no matter how sophisticated the technological infrastructure.

This is the reality that we have failed to realise until the recent natural disaster. Unlike the pandemic where telecommunications services are serviceable, the recent non-stop downpour and the resultant massive flooding washed away many telecommunications infrastructure and networks.

Simultaneously, the "family-ness" level plummeted just when genuine family-oriented units were needed the most.

No doubt, this is a test for all Malaysians, whether they are directly affected or not.

After all, we are weaved to one another to form the social fabric dubbed "Keluarga Malaysia". In short, we are back to the #kitajagakita mantra. The Malaysian "family-ness" value is the glue that brings us together in times of crisis.

Not surprisingly, donating food items to flood victims uplifts the "familyness" among Malay-sians. Next is the *gotong-royong* involving thousands of university students who volunteered to help those affected by the floods, in faraway places that were once alien to the students and campus life.





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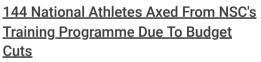


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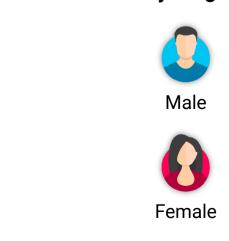
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Herein lies the wisdom of it all, after being "absent" from the Malaysian academic scene for almost four decades due to the introduction of the Universities and University Colleges Act in the 1970s.

Value (as in prize) and profit have become the mainstay of success crafted by key performance indicators, rankings and unbridled competition dominated by the market.

Wisdom as the essence of learning and knowledge, therefore, lost its place and relevance. Education was further reduced to a mere training exercise, even then within a limited scope.



 So when post-flood activities, such as donation drives and *gotong-royong*, come into force, statements like "Much is learnt when engaging with the community compared with just campus-based activities" begin to resurface.

Likewise, "We have encountered new aspects that our textbooks never even touched on".

These are vital touchpoints of experiential learning where wisdom emerges tacitly; where cultural intelligence takes root and grow by connecting all the dots.

Thus, a "whole-driven" approach — as envisaged by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation — that includes wholeperson, whole-institution and whole-community approaches, is making a comeback, bringing with it the much-needed wisdom that our educational ecosystem is deprived of.

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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