

HUMBLE GIANT OF A MAN

If there is righteousness in the heart,
there is beauty in the character,
if there is beauty in the character,
there is harmony in the home,
if there is harmony in the home,
there is order in the nation,
if there is order in the nation,
there is peace in the world.



Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam being robed by then USM vice chancellor **Dzulkipli Abdul Razak** during the convocation in 2008.



**DZULKIFLI
ABDUL RAZAK**

THE above has been attributed to the 11th President of India, Dr Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, when he spoke at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France in April 2007. Indeed, this is one of many quotes that exemplified this beloved mortal who died quite suddenly on July 27 due to a massive cardiac arrest.

Kalam, who held office from 2002 to 2007, was a renowned scientist in the fields of physics and aerospace engineering. Born and raised in Rameswaram, he studied at Madras Institute of Technology in Tamil Nadu.

Affectionately known as the People's President, Kalam was very fond of students, especially high schoolchildren, who looked up to him as a lifetime inspiration, notably in the sciences. Kalam was considered the brain behind the Indian missile programme and played an instrumental role in the Pokhran nuclear test in 1998.

Kalam took up academic pursuit as Professor of Technology and Societal Transformation at Anna University, Chennai in November 2001. Yet, he still made time to meet high school students across India to instil confidence into them.

He wrote a number of books urging young

minds to dream big and become lifetime achievers. In *Ignited Minds* (2002), he related his experience of meeting students from various parts of India, and getting to know them as potential leaders of

the nation, to be nurtured beyond what meets the eye. In 1998, his book *Vision India 2020* envisioned the status of a developed nation. Turn-

ing Points (2012) focused on his life during his presidency when he urged India to embrace the use of science and technology in conceptualising the country's Vision 2020.

Other than his writings and interacting with students, teachers, saints and sages, he touched the lives of everyone who worked with him. Many recall his humility and empathy even while working on stressful projects of high national interest such as India's strategic missile programme.

Allegedly, he gave everyone an opportunity to contribute to a project irrespective of their place in the pecking order.

His humility can be gauged from a report attesting that "Kalam used to carry his resignation letter with him". "If anything went wrong, he would accept responsibility and step down. There are not many leaders like that." Status and position meant little to him.

Kalam was conferred Honorary Doctor of Science in August 2008 by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). He gave a memorable speech titled *Evolution of Enlightened Citizenship* expounding a 3-D lifestyle of not only being sustainable but also enlightened. His depth of knowledge and breath of experience were phenomenal and his passion infectious. The message was timely as USM aspired to become an Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) status university. Kalam was, no doubt, just the kind of transformational leader that USM was privileged to be associated with in order to clinch the APEX status. When the university was awarded the APEX recognition, Kalam's legacy of 3-D lifestyle was very much intertwined with the context of the *kampus sejahtera* programme.

Kalam will be fondly remembered and missed. Despite his stature and achievements, his last tweet did not fail to show his humbleness: "Going to Shillong... to take course on Liveable Planet Earth at IIM (Indian Institute of Management)." This giant of a person was humble enough to continue educating himself at the age of 84, come October. It all stems from being righteous in the heart as the vital force to drive him forward.

The writer is honorary professor at the University of Nottingham and Chair of Leadership at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. Email him at education@nst.com.my