

## APEX and NEM find common ground

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Comment

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THE New Economic Model (NEM) is shaping up to be a booster for the Higher Education Ministry's Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) agenda in particular, and higher education in general, through its Strategic Plan.

Realising that the higher education sector needs help, the NEM report enumerates a number of policy suggestions that must now be put into practice to bolster the implementation of the Model.

These pertain to the areas of human resource and talent management that are said to be lagging behind in what it takes to move Malaysia forward economically.

That said, the report is also critical of the industry for lacking information needed to do a better job of tackling the human capital issue.

In essence, the report has broadened the horizon for both the providers and users of knowledge to work closer so as to realise the proper implementation of the Model, which comprises three major elements: high income, sustainability and inclusiveness.

Each interacts and intersects with one another -- with the aim of lifting the quality of life among Malaysians as envisaged under the 1Malaysia concept.

It encompasses far more than the economic goals of Malaysia. To quote the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak: "This is about the life chances open to future generations. This is about raising the sights of low-income families to help them out of poverty. This is about the very fabric of our society where we each have opportunities and responsibilities."

In fact, "high income" in this context would mean "high-value" (i.e an advanced society), without forgetting the importance of "high-touch" as encapsulated in the other two elements: sustainability and inclusiveness.

Inclusiveness means "enabling all communities to fully benefit from the wealth of Malaysia", which extends over generations as spelled out in sustainability or "meeting present needs without compromising the needs of future generations".

It is here that the similarities between NEM and APEX agenda -- although expressed in different ways -- are rather striking.

For example, inclusiveness for APEX includes those at the bottom of the global economic pyramid, or "the bottom billions".

They represent the last 60 per cent of the global population of about 6.8 billion people.

The NEM, on the other hand, is focused on the bottom 40 per cent of Malaysians whose earnings are less than RM1,500 per month. If RM3,000 is the cut-off point, then the percentage is doubled.

Reportedly, it is only the top 20 per cent of Malaysian income earners who enjoy a strong salary growth over more than a decade.

This creates disparity -- of almost 65 per cent -- between the wage earners and Malaysian "bottom millions", who rightly deserve a great deal of attention (high-touch) should Malaysia reach the advanced country status a decade from now.

As the Prime Minister reiterated, not only does he want Malaysians to earn better, but they must also live better.

The APEX agenda envisions a series of cutting-edge flagship programmes that are able to create high-value or high income that will elevate the socio-economic well-being of the society at large, functionally and emotionally!

Talented human resources will be in demand.

Currently, the opposite appears to be the case. The difficulty of recruiting professionals, relative to unskilled foreign labour, is phenomenal as highlighted in the NEM report.

All this must be realigned with the "sustainability" dimension, which is common to both the APEX and NEM.

In fact, APEX has embraced "sustainability" as its overarching principle in shaping the future of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) as advocated by United Nations through the Decade of Education for Sustainable Education (2005-2014) covering the entire education sector.

What the NEM has done is to put this aspect into perspective because education for sustainable development or sustainability is a prerequisite for interpreting the meaning of sustainability in the NEM.

Indeed, this includes improved environment, sound management and preservation of resources that would enable sustained growth, and instilling confidence in government.

For this to happen, it is necessary to have the same transformation in the education sector.

Indeed, this is how the NEM should be driven: through education at every level, while itself being transformed where conventional wisdom is being challenged.

In doing so, it outlined eight Strategic Reform Initiatives, one of which is building knowledge base infrastructure by taking into account aspects of innovation and creativity.

On that note, we sincerely congratulate the Prime Minister for his commitment to a bold undertaking and initiative to firmly secure the future of Malaysia and its citizens.

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