

Coming together for tomorrow

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Comment

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THE cabinet line-up announced recently is yet another clear commitment by the government to the future of education in Malaysia.

The appointment of the deputy prime minister to the Education Ministry is a firm endorsement that education will continue to ride the crest of change to shape the nation's future.

There can be no better person than the deputy prime minister himself, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, to look into the vital issues to help future generations of Malaysians to be even more cohesive in leading the nation into a progressive and prosperous era.



Education must lay a strong foundation where education is not only seen but, more importantly, act as the leveler of society.

UNESCO has identified four main pillars for education -- learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

Without a doubt, it is in the last two pillars that the fragmented Malaysian education system needs to be mended, and fast, while enhancing the former two pillars.

The commitment was further reaffirmed when the Minister of Higher Education was reappointed despite speculation that the ministry would merge with the Education Ministry.

That this is not so, speaks volumes about the concern that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has about higher education.

Najib was himself once the minister of education, then a single ministry, and had demonstrated a deep understanding on the necessity for a separate Higher Education Ministry.

After all, like the Education Ministry, the higher education counterpart has invested much in drawing up its strategy to transform itself in line with the national mission towards Vision 2020.

Moreover, much has been put into motion under the leadership of the minister to enable the implementation of the transformation plan to remain intact.

To have dissolved the ministry or even changed it mid-stream would only have convinced cynics that education, particularly higher education, is no more than a pawn in the political power play, at the expense of the nation's future.

Now there can only be minimal distraction or uncertainty, as to where higher education should be heading.

This is because any change in education will take time to show discernible impact.

What's important is, there can be no compromise in the general direction for a strategic future, not least, when much has been invested to realise the strategic intent.

The cabinet line-up also provides an educational value-add with the establishment of the Green Technology, Water and Energy Ministry.

This is assuming the word "green" refers to sustainability not just with respect to technology, but also the use of natural resources, namely water and energy.

The United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014, has very significant implications for this new ministry.

Sustainability or the effort to go "green" involves a drastic mindset change from the "unsustainable" paradigm of yesteryears.

For the paradigm shift to succeed it must start with education, including research and development aspects -- a realm of higher education.

Unless this new ministry works interactively with the education sector, chances are there will be a kind of "cognitive dissonance" on how it will impact the community at large.

Therefore, it is imperative that all the ministries should seek to collaborate with each other in the interest of a more sustainable tomorrow.

Particularly because this embraces a wide-ranging dimension, of which environment is just one, such that the word "green" seems rather inhibitive compared with "sustainable", as referred to in many global agendas and initiatives under the auspices of the UN.

The preference for "sustainable" will remove the ambiguity in support of the critical global agenda where Malaysia is signatory or at least partial to, including in the context of education, for that matter.

Once this is appropriately contextualised and understood, there is no doubt that education will be a vehicle for transforming higher education for a sustainable tomorrow.

In this regard, Universiti Sains Malaysia, for example, is already carrying a mandate to mainstream sustainability as the overarching principle in higher education in collaboration with the United Nations University since 2005.

No doubt, this is the way to go.

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