

Creating blue oceans for the future

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Comment

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INTELLECTUAL renaissance is the main take-home message that came from Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's opening address at the Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) seminar on education and training held recently.

This was contextualised within Malaysia's unique position in the intellectual world, based on at least six wide-ranging dimensions:

First is the rich, indigenous and diverse Malay archipelago that reaches out to no less than 500 million people of the Malay-speaking world. Indeed, in terms of numbers alone, it puts Malay-based language among the most widely spoken languages in the world. This is certainly one uniqueness that Malaysia could harness for itself as part of the BOS.

Second is the close association of Malaysia as a dominant, vibrant and progressive Muslim country. That it is part of the Asian economic dynamo puts it on a unique platform to reach out towards the emerging countries of the Emirates, for example.

Turning Malaysia into an Islamic financial and halal hub is something that is within reach, given the numerous initiatives. Again, this presents another opportunity for BOS where the Malay and Muslim communities have natural roles and advantages that could be leveraged upon.

Thirdly, given Malaysia's long history of interfacing with mainland China as a friendly trading nation offers yet another unique opportunity.

This was acted upon proactively by Malaysia when it became one of the first countries in the region to recognise the role of China and subsequently establish formal diplomatic ties.

The existence of the Peranakan, for example, is strong evidence of the benefits of such long-standing relationships extending naturally today to the newer generations of Chinese Malaysians in support of long-standing traditions. This is especially so in engaging the people of emerging China, the new economic powerhouse of the world.

Fourth is Malaysia's links with the Indian subcontinent, going back to the days of pre-colonial Majapahit and Sriwijaya. In those days, rich engagements cut across cultural and religious boundaries.

The little-known Chitty community of today (the Indian equivalent of the Chinese Peranakan) is again testimony to this. In many ways, these traditions have influenced the making of today's Malaysia and continue to serve as conduits with yet another global powerhouse in Asia—India.

Fifth are the vestiges of Western powers that were once the superstructure that divided and ruled. There are plenty of lessons to be learned from the decades of love-hate experiences during the colonial periods; of what worked and what did not, of what appealed and what destroyed.

These could serve as excellent starting points to plan anew as we move to the future, as long as we are willing to learn from history.

Sixth is its position, straddling the east and west, north and south; the "centre" of Southeast Asia as it were. Yet, it has been protected from the harshest of natural disasters.

Each of these unique posturing of Malaysia present invaluable opportunities to develop its own BOS. More so when combined in a myriad of ways, culminating in an even greater BOS for Malaysians.

Collectively, they could be a powerful confluence to the new sea of opportunities that must be jointly harnessed and developed for the larger meaning of things.

While not many countries are so lucky as Malaysia in this aspect, we have not taken full advantage of our situation in equal unique ways.

In other words, we remain firmly anchored in "the red ocean"—busy imitating and playing second fiddle without paying enough attention to the context we are in.

What we perceived as "competitiveness" in fact turns out to be a culture "group-think" and not daring to strike out on our own. Consequently, we are condemned to be followers most of the time, despite the rich diversity

we claim to have.

Here is where the BOS comes into play, argues Chan Kim, co-author of a book of the same name. He profoundly inspired the audience by providing alternative strategic thinking, away from the notion of benchmarking or even head-on competition.

In contrast, he chose to make competition irrelevant, by writing out one's own rules instead, and excelling in implementing them so that we can lead and ultimately become the leader.

For that to happen, an intellectual renaissance is imperative; one that dares to create many blue oceans for the future. Unless we dare to dream that another world is possible, we will be stuck with one as part of the old "herd". Lest we forget, Wawasan 2020 demands we create a developed Malaysia. Invariably that calls for no less than BOS!

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