

No need to rewrite education blueprint

Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

New Sunday Times - 03/23/2008

FORMER Minister of Higher Education Datuk Mustapa Mohamed is moving to the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry. Although he was in charge for only two years, To' Pa managed to endear himself not only in words but also in his actions.



When he took over as the second minister of the just established ministry, it was in the midst of uncertainties. Within a short period, the situation stabilised. Animosities and suspicions that coloured the atmosphere gradually disappeared. Just like the first-class scholar he is, the minister picked up fast the major issues plaguing the higher education sector.

He listened intently, asked pertinent questions and, most of all, remained level-headed. It is not surprising that he gained much respect from those who came to know him professionally. More importantly, he remained approachable, modest and honest.

He is candid and frank in recognising the shortcomings facing him, sometimes to the chagrin of his own staff. He never failed to engage almost all the stakeholders to find out what went wrong and sought to understand them without resorting to the usual finger-pointing game.

To' Pa continued to listen while seeking effective solutions, which often was not easy. Still he pursued relentlessly. So it is not difficult to see why To' Pa succeeded as a minister.

Those who had the privilege of accompanying him on business trips overseas would soon realise that it was work, work and work. Commencing immediately after breakfast, the routine would not end until way past midnight. Any time available would be filled with discussions and briefings. In all this, he was modest in his ways; demanding but never intimidating.

The best testimony to his passion for higher education is no doubt the successful completion of the National Higher Education Action Plan and the accompanying strategies, launched by the prime minister on Aug 27 last year. Ever since then, it has all been about how to realise the action plan and strategies set forth in the transformation roadmaps.

It was in the thick of all this that the election was called. After a brief lull of two weeks, the machinery has started again. Most were hoping that To' Pa would be back in the driver's seat. But it is not to be. For someone whose leadership is well-recognised, this is understandable. We thank and wish him well.

The higher education community needs to forge ahead as the targets are already there. Logically, what has been laid down should be rolled out as planned. There could be some refinements as nothing is cast in stone.

But there must be no back-tracking. Not least, another attempt to rewrite the blueprint for higher education. Enough time and effort have been accorded to this, and quite rightly so. At times, blueprints have been deliberately left on the shelves just so that another one could be launched. If this is the case, little will be achieved.

So, as we welcome the new Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Seri Khaled Nordin, the enthusiasm, aspirations and expectations continue to remain high. The "urgent" question is how such high enthusiasm, aspirations and expectations can be shared with the young generation, namely students of institutions of higher education. There must be even greater willingness to engage with these young minds in intellectual ways.

Gone are the days of "command-and-control" where students are deemed to be passive recipients of sorts. We must recognise that times have changed and that education is all about facilitating the change for the future. Universities are after all the intended passage to make that future possible. Otherwise, they will be failing in their duties, something we can ill-afford.

[Terms & Conditions](#)