

Ideas can bring new wonders

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Article

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[Fidel Castro feels ideas can bring about changes](#)

PRESIDENT Fidel Castro recounted in a recent article his experience when he was about to be arrested by a lieutenant of the then president, General Fulgencio Batista. As the soldiers took aim at Castro, the patrol leader named Sarria said: "Ideas cannot be killed."

He kept on repeating that ideas cannot be killed, presumably in reference to the futility of killing Fidel just because they hated his ideas.

This was on July 26, 1953 when at the age of 26, Castro led a group of 160 to attack the Moncada garrison in Santiago de Cuba, at the southern part of the island.

The aim was to spark a popular uprising against Batista who himself had seized power in a military coup on March 10, 1952. The foreign-backed Batista regime had become unpopular because of the abuses, corruption and injustices he practised.

Batista crushed the attempted assault mercilessly. More than 60 of Castro's compatriots were killed.

Castro and others were arrested and served time. Following a nationwide amnesty campaign, they were released on May 15, 1955. Castro was exiled to Mexico on July 7 that year.

By then, he had been imbued with many more ideas about the future of Cuba. In a letter he wrote from prison, he emphasised the importance of ideas as "a symbol, a great potential force". He believed that ideas can bring about changes.

There can be no better illustration as to the transformative powers of ideas than the Cuban education system, especially in the context of science and technology.

On the wall of one centre of excellence at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas at Santa Clara, some 400km from the capital city, a quotation from Castro reads: "For an idea to be successful, we need to think about it very well. We need to defend it, we need to persuade many people and then, finally, the idea is triumphant."

The director of the Centro de Bioactivos Quimicos proudly talked about the latest success in drug discovery—an innovative sugar cane-based dermatological product that is to be launched globally in a few months. This is just one more idea that will continue to make the Cuban healthcare system the envy of many countries worldwide.

At another research centre, the Finlay Institute at Havana that specialises in the production of human vaccines, many more ideas have transformed the Cuban health sector. In the last 20 years, the institute has produced at least seven vaccines for the country and has been accorded 11 new patents and recognised by 39 sanitary medical registries in different countries., including many stringent quality requirements.

Cuban scientists have developed a unique meningococcal B vaccine ready to be commercialised globally. No less than three potential products are at various stages of development —a cholera vaccine, a pneumococcal vaccine and a meningococcal vaccine.

Before the year-end, the institute expects to produce a halal vaccine.

It is not surprising to know how successful Cuba has been in controlling many infectious diseases. The vice-president of the Cuban Academy of Sciences, and director-general of the Pedro Kouri Institute of Tropical Medicine in Havana, said cholera was eliminated in 1871.

Yellow fever was eradicated in 1902, bubonic plague in 1915, smallpox in 1923 and bancrofti filariasis in 1947. After independence, Cuba wiped out other infectious diseases such as polio (1962), malaria (1967), neonatorum tetanus (1972), diphteria (1979), measles (1993), and rubella and mumps (1995).

It has carried out 100 per cent immunisation programmes for more than 10 diseases, including hemophilus B.

Currently, in many places, the vaccinations against influenza is limited only to the elderly and one in five children are said to be not fully immunised by their first birthday, according to the World Health Organisation.

Unlike others who are fearful of new ideas and are bent on suppressing them, the Cubans seem to have learned that ideas can indeed create wonders. In turn, they are very adept at working seamlessly in transforming these ideas into meaningful products for mankind.

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