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COMMENT

MH370 could lead to new mindset

TRANSFORMATION: Society cannot function efficiently without mastering the sciences

OVERARCHING and underpinning ideas of development was the driving idea for planned transformation of Malaysian society during the past five decades. Two mindset changes of the ruling elite were the turning points of development thinking.

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The first, in the 1980s, was when the government decided that it could not do everything by itself and required the participation of the private and corporate sectors. This mindset change led to the formulation of the policies of privatisation and corporatisation.

The second mindset change was in the first decade of the 21st century when the government declared that the government does not know everything. This mindset change led to inclusiveness of all levels of people in the Government Transformation Programmes, the Economic Transformation Programme and the Education Reform Initiatives.

The experience of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 is pointing to the possibility of a third mindset change, which will be the turning point of development.

The search for MH370 reveals ignorance in so many fields of investigations. This unprecedented situation in human history has put Malaysia on the world map. This event can be used by Malaysia as a third mindset change affecting all sectors of development thinking.

Reporting on the MH370 phenomenon, reporters with scientific vocabulary can engage with the experts in conversations and, at the very least, attempt to ask sensible questions. The experts who have been called to come forward understand that their knowledge has limitations and they depend on their practical experiences over the years.

Like the Olympians who give their best, experts know their limitations and true experts are stretching their all to contribute to scholarship and society meaningfully, cautiously and credibly.

What is clear is that there is the limitation of knowledge experts in almost all disciplines. The phenomenon acknowledges that there are gaps of knowledge between and among the experts, the intellectuals, among the citizens of the country and the world. The generation of scores of theories without empirical evidence and the beliefs without intellectual discernment is an indicator of universal ignorance.

There are gaps between the nations, the numbers and limited knowledge of their experts and the sophistication of their technical instruments. Knowledge creation and knowledge generation are not just by those in universities but also by those in companies that serve the military and governments.

*Australian defence personnel aboard **HMAS 'Perth'** on the lookout for missing Malaysia Airlines **flight MH370** in the southern Indian Ocean. This unprecedented incident has put Malaysia on the world map.* AFP pic

In terms of knowledge creation and the development of experts, the number of good universities in a nation matters. The number of active researchers in all disciplines matters. The methodologies used can range from desktop library research, document and text analysis methodologies to advanced laboratory and field research. The number of collaborations and publications matters.

Collegial exchanges and support matter. Being competitive globally matters. The experts with knowledge and experience and equipment to unravel such mysteries as MH370 come from nations with good universities and competitive and sophisticated companies.

The passion for knowledge pursuit in the western world is evidenced by the books written on all subjects, even in those areas considered unthinkable. The research passion is evidenced by research in all kinds of problems. In the education sector, the American Educational Research Association (Aera) is an example of the sustained incremental efforts of growing communities of experts with vast, deep knowledge and experiences.

Aera's focus and leadership in educational research is 98 years, longer than the age of new nations. Like its other annual meetings, the 2014 Aera Meeting with 2,400 sessions, hundreds of presenters, expert chairpersons and discussants attracts 15,000 scholars and participants.

There is always the generation of new ideas, the synergising and application of existing ideas, the celebration of innovations, the maturing of academic disciplines and the evolution of new ones. Aera's example of the growing of researchers with robust knowledge that create possibilities for experts to understand and solve the mysteries of natural phenomena and innovate should be emulated.

In Malaysia, there was a call for a revolution in education. In many ways, beginning steps were already taken but not far enough and not deep enough. There must be the urgency to grow minds and thinking processes in scientific domains founded on mathematical thought and scientific disciplines.

The circumstances of MH370, with insights regarding serious gaps in knowledge and expertise, should lead to the third mindset change.

The third mindset change is that the society cannot know the surrounding world and cannot function with efficiency without mastering the realms of the sciences. In the educational sector, this mindset change must lead to science and thinking curriculum review, and refocus of educational policies and practices.