

KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

# WHY OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS AN OVERHAUL

This will enable our workforce to succeed in the brave new world of globalisation, writes **K.K. TAN**

**O**NE of the most important news since the 14th General Election is a report in the local media about Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad stating that our education system needs an overhaul.

Dr Mahathir had also said recently that the focus of education should be on science and mathematics, improving the use of English as the language of knowledge and doing business and on promoting moral values. Many key players of commerce and industry are also calling for reforms in our education system.

The first thing about solving any problem is to recognise that there is a problem.

In 2012, I wrote a piece in a local publication on the challenges of the proposed education review then, in which I stated: "When there are so many vacancies in the job market and yet so many unemployed graduates, something must be wrong somewhere."

The first question to ask about education is what is the purpose of education? And the simple answer, whether here or anywhere in the world, should be to produce technically competent knowledge workers who are able to solve the problems of our society, communicate well, be socially and morally responsible and have a constructively critical mindset.

Many employers have complained about many candidates not being able to communicate well, especially in English, even graduates with good academic results. Anyone can have the best idea in the world but if he cannot communicate the idea well, it is not worth anything.

It is our education system at the primary and secondary (foundation) levels which needs to be

more critically reviewed.

It is sad that our education system is not producing enough Malay knowledge workers who can communicate well and who are employable, especially in the private sector.

The previous changes to the education system, which were intended to help them do better in their studies and career, seem to have backfired. Before the changes were made to our education system, there should have been adequate studies done.

Our education system should have been left to professional educators and academics to manage and chart its course and politicians should not have interfered, except perhaps, in only setting the broad objectives in a transparent manner.

The education system is also the source of many other problems that our country is facing today.

As an example, the electorate were generally gullible and many of them had been easily manipulated by unscrupulous leaders. The country needed a massive scandal such as IMDB and the availability of the new information and communications technology media landscape to wake many people up.

Thinking inside-the-box and incompetent thinking process, petty-mindedness, inability to solve problems and overcome

major challenges also contributed to the poor education system.

Dishonest and destructive "little Napoleons" in government agencies who think that the people owe them a living and who do not understand why they are called "civil servants" in the first place also played a part.

Prevalence of "laziness" in the thinking process, negative working attitude in the workplace, petty politics and not focused on finding solutions and producing results are also factors.

Our education system may not be as bad as it seems. But we must remember that with globalisation, we are competing with the rest of the world.

There are other complex issues such as the commitment to vernacular schools. We also have a free enterprise system with many private education providers catering to mostly non-Malays and expatriates, leaving behind mostly Malay students in the government-run schools. This is an unhealthy situation which needs to be addressed quickly.

Basically, our education system determines the survival of our country and our ability to develop our economy equitably for all races. It will teach us how to deal with the real internal and external challenges or threats.

A good education system is able to produce people of all

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races who can see the big picture that we are all connected together in a small ship called Malaysia sailing in a rough ocean with the stark reality that we either sink or swim together.

A bad education system breeds racial conflict, which undermines the efficiency of our productive forces to develop our economy. A leader who knowingly plays the race card would be effectively undermining the interests of his own race. A leader should fight for his own race if it is oppressed but not play the race card against non-existent threats and for greed, power and corruption.

A good education system teaches us to learn properly from our history and world history and teaches us that there is no such thing as supremacy of any ethnicity over another. A good education system would make all our people understand that beneath our different ethnicities, we are all the same and created equal by God.

Our government has to overhaul our education system if we are to succeed in the brave new world of globalisation.

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