

7th Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative

Transcription – Professor Tan Sri Datuk Dr Anuwar Ali

Honourable Mr. Furukawa, distinguished guests and members of the panel, and our young leaders from all over Asia,

Let me once again thank Mr. Furukawa and Hitachi for inviting me to speak at this very important gathering. I hope I can share some of my thoughts in observations on education in a dynamic Asia. It is a privilege to be here this morning to share these views with our young leaders. I am not sure whether I am the right person to talk to our young leaders because I believe there is at least a 35-year gap between my age and theirs. I am perhaps out-of-date. And secondly, to take the podium after three distinguished speakers, I am not sure whether I can say much more because I believe they have covered most of the things that I want to say this morning. But nevertheless, as I said, it is a privilege to share what I have, through my experience as an educator for the past 32 years or so, with our young leaders.

Now, I will cover a few things which have been covered earlier but perhaps I'll add my observation and thoughts along the way. I'm sure our young leaders here all realise that education is an important instrument, whether in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore or other countries in this region, or to our development as individuals because we go through the education process. When taken at a macro level, the society is also developing a true and good education and at the end of the day, we all develop as a nation. This is all the more so because, to me, education in Asia in the dynamic sense will prove to be the main instrument to develop our people. Education stakeholders must respond to these changes. Stakeholders refer to people such as ourselves gathered here for the forum this morning, politicians, educators, policy-makers etc. How do they respond? Of course, each stakeholder's response will differ according to the needs or the perceived needs of the country in which they live. They want to believe in a very dynamic Asia, which caters to the needs of every citizen, no matter which country you live in.

One of the challenges is minimising inequalities that we observe today; partly the consequence of globalisation: income disparities, poverty, opportunities for education, and opportunities for jobs. The degree of inequalities varies from country to country. And I am sure our young leaders, through the forum session yesterday and through our good and distinguished panelists, are beginning to understand and be involved in looking at these processes. Understanding the issues and the trends, is certainly an important aspect of our own development both as an individual and as a nation. At the end of the day, I think the education system of any country must be able to project a balanced development of the individual and the society, whether in intellectual development or moral and spiritual development, because the Asian values we hold dear reflect all these.

In Asia, as we see today and here this morning, we have a diverse kind of cultural, ethnic and political background. We develop simultaneously but sometimes separately. But as we witness today, leaders want to see some form of integration. There is a similarity of interests between our countries in these areas. As mentioned earlier, we also have important links between Asian countries – migration, mobility of workers and trade and transactions between countries. Malaysia and Thailand, for instance, are famous for trading, and it encourages communication. There is also capital mobility. Capital moves from Japan and other developed countries to this part of the world.

But besides that, the dynamism of the Asian countries is also seen by the fact that we want to develop and progress. Today, Asia accounts for more than 60% of the world's population. Yet, it generates only 25% of the total output of the world. When we see all these, we then begin to understand what development is all about and look at the process of development and ask ourselves, whether it is fair. We will have to see the history – the process of development over the last 25 to 100 years. We can see that in the last 20 years or so, the development of China has brought more possibilities of international trade and created the 'middle-class'. I believe this middle-

class, whether they are in Japan, China, India or South East Asia, will become potential consumers. We have seen the problems faced by relatively poorer countries. These are all part of development. Whether it is good for us or not, we will let the young think about it.

Southeast Asian people also has to think. We often hear the saying, "think out of the box". But to me, Southeast Asia has to think within the box as well. It depends on how big you think the box is. If the box is small, then you are very narrow. I am not going to give you the answer to this.

Besides labour mobility between countries in this part of the world, there is also the flow of capital from various countries. There is diversity in this capital flow. In the years to come, we have to see what the role of China and India is in this. At the end of the day, it depends on how we utilise technology that is within ourselves, on whether we are innovative and creative. Science and technology will bring us together but in a different way.

I will now go on to the role of education and rising expectations. As I said earlier, I will elaborate and reiterate some areas.

The role of our education is very critical, in terms of managing and providing human resources in businesses, and supplying highly skilled and knowledgeable manpower in the knowledge economy. We want to produce employable graduates and minimise the gap between the needs of industry and the skills imparted to our graduates. We always tend to and it is easier to blame the universities because we say universities do not have a good curriculum - industries move in one way but universities move in another.

However, a good approach is to provide employment opportunities. When you have employment opportunities, whether it is the right type of employment or whether the spectrum of employment is wide enough, fresh university graduates will have no problem adapting if they are well-trained, articulate and creative to throw ideas at the workplace. The problem is meeting employment demand. If there are many graduates going through education and entering the market, but the economy cannot provide employment opportunities, then trouble arises. So we cannot always blame the universities.

Moving further, at a higher level, intellectual capital is very important. You graduates actually are an asset to the country. You have the power of determining the future. The economy is too dynamic. We depend on graduates because they will be at the apex of the system, giving new, bright and innovative ideas. This way, we can further move on. And when you have all this, the quality of life and giving education for all come into place. While we expect so much from the universities, we all must take note that even after graduation, the process of learning is never-ending. So, education for all and life-long learning is an important part for our development.

There are three important areas if I zero down to the theme of this conference. One is integrated and balanced development. Intellectuals will prefer to focus on the moral aspect. This involves people – all of us as individuals, as a community and as a nation.

Then, environmental consciousness. This was said I think in the beginning by the first speaker, and economic efficiency. Every nation wants to be the best trading and global partner. But one must 'tailor-make' these so that the citizens of that particular country will also be benefitting from that process. It is no point if you have high economic growth without taking into consideration all the ills in the society. This is what I meant by balancing economic efficiency and social responsibility and sharing.

In short, ladies and gentlemen, I think education is certainly opening up goals for individuals, for nations and so on. I think education as we know it today must be the guiding instrument to ensure that every nation will thrive in the economic sense, with social responsibility going hand-in-hand. If every nation in this part of the world wants Asia to be more dynamic, and more dynamic means sharing, but every country wants to compete without sharing, that is indeed a problem. I will let you all think about it.

I think sometimes at universities, we are taught what to expect, but we are not taught what reality is all about. So I think, and I hope, I have shared some of my thoughts with you, young leaders. I wish I can stand here another half a day. I have so much more to tell. Let us all share what we can and I am sure at the end of this conference, you will become better leaders.

Thank you very much.