

Making a difference in their own ways

SLOW AND STEADY: Nation-building a step-by-step, block-by-block process

MALAYSIA has enjoyed a successful state building. The modern state as the political entity of governance, built during the colonial period and eventually becoming independent Malaysia, has three fundamental pillars — territoriality (clear physical boundaries), citizenship (individuals legally proclaimed as citizens), and rule of law (constitution).

Together with "society" (the demographic base) and "market" (the platform for transactions of need, want and desire), the Malaysian modern state arguably has been functioning well even without a "nation".

In other words, the Malaysian state has survived for decades without a nation, arguably in a better position than Bangsa Moro of the Philippines that has a nation but without a state.

Why need the nation?

The idea of a nation usually developed from the common needs of the people, who comprised different social groups but located physically in the same state, seeking a collective identity, hence a "national identity".

In Malaysia, since its independence and formation as a federal state, both the government in power and non-governmental social groups have entertained a number of ideas for a nation they prefer or desire, or "nation-of-intents".

For example, since the early 1960s we entertained the idea of "Malaysian Malaysia" as a nation. This is still actively promoted by some sections of the Malaysian population. Then in 1991, the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* was introduced. In 2009 the concept "1Malaysia" was made public and widely promoted.

Both ideas of the nations, though populist, remained important set of ruling ideas promoted by the current state regarding where we are



The 1966 Old Puteras (OP66) in Shah Alam on Thursday. They have been actively engaged in nation-building efforts while pursuing their individual careers. Pic by Mohd Asri Saifuddin Mamat

heading in the future as a nation.

The one notion of nation that has been actively pursued by the Federal Government since 1991 is *Bangsa Malaysia*, or "a united Malaysian nation", introduced by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as one of the nine challenges in his Vision 2020 declaration.

As a state that has institutionalised since early 1950s, a tradition of central planning — indeed, we have just launched the Eleventh Malaysia Plan in 2015 and before that a series of different national blueprints — and then lived through a highly regimented life during the Emergency of 1948-1960, the Malaysian state has inherited from the Cold War era, a strong top-down approach in governance that regimented the socio-political life of all Malaysians.

To this day, this approach remains the "winning formula" or the "pillar" of governance of the state, even after the Cold War ended in 1991. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the post-war colonial state, and later continued by the Malaysian state, initiated numerous top-down nation-building projects, motivated by a conscious "social engineering" orientation.

One of such projects, and it remains a famous one, was the setting up of an inter-ethnic Boys Wing of the Federation Military College (FMC) on July 3, 1952, and, 15 years later, on December 9, 1966, elevated to the Royal Military College (RMC).

To be bestowed the "Royal" title was a great honour indeed to FMC for no other educational institution in the history of Malaysia since then has been bestowed such a title. What enhanced the significance of the title "Royal" is found in The Charter of RMC that clearly spelt out its nation-building role.

The RMC Charter states that the college "was established with the objective of preparing young

Malaysians to become Officers in the Malaysian Armed Forces, hold office in the higher divisions of the public service and become leaders in the professional, commercial and industrial life of the country". It is summed up in RMC's motto "Serve to Lead".

The batch of "boys" or students who entered the year FMC became RMC in 1966 called themselves as OP66 (Old Putera 1966). Some of them considered themselves as a special batch and prefer to be addressed as "The Royal Batch". What is significant at the moment is that OP66 will celebrate its 50th anniversary today.

Has this so-called "Royal Batch" achieved and fulfilled the objective of the RMC Charter?

Indeed, true to the objective of the Charter and the motto of RMC, batch OP66, originally consisting of 105 members, has produced or become important and respected leaders in the public, private and community sectors.

In the Malaysian Armed Forces, members of OP66 have become First Admiral, Lieutenant General, Major General and Brigadier General and a few retired as colonels. In the public service, some have become directors-general, vice-chancellors, professors, distinguished professors and ambassadors.

A larger number is found in the commercial and industrial sectors as chief executive officers, chief operating officers and chief information officers and owners of many private companies, including one that deals with helicopters.

If we include those quiet achievers who are rarely in the limelight, such as a pilot, a number of medical doctors who are general practitioners, and a few medical specialists in leading hospitals locally and abroad, and accountants in both private and public sector, they have indeed "served to lead", too, in the public

sphere. A few have ended up being the selfless philanthropists.

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In sports, too, we have the pride of having the first school boy to run the 100m sprint in under 11 seconds; another to run the mile in under 4 minutes and one of the niftiest scrum half playing for the Malaysian Rugby Team.

In summary, OP66 and every other batch before and after them, have truly achieved and fulfilled the leadership role expected of them as stated in the RMC Charter, irrespective of what their positions had been.

This is only possible because, through the intensive military training they received continuously during their stay at RMC, each and every one of them has imbibed the three critical values to be a successful leader:

A high level of self-discipline in terms of time management;

EMBEDDED within the esprit de corps value that is needed for teamwork; and,

RESOURCEFUL and robust in confronting challenges, irrespective of size and intensity.

In the bigger picture, OP66 and other OPs have been actively engaged and deeply involved, consciously or otherwise, in their different ways, in a step-by-step and block-by-block effort at nation-building while they pursue their individual careers.

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