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## Exemplifying the art of nation-building

The Star, Malaysia

WHEN I was told that for my Prominent Professorial Lecture at UCSI University I was being paired with renowned academic and scientist Tan Sri Prof Dr Omar Abdul Rahman, I was excited, but I also felt a great weight of humility.

Comparatively, in terms of mileage in academic and governmental contributions, I am a mere atom in his universe.

However, I heard that this great man, 20 years my senior, was also excited to be paired with me, because I am an academic renowned as a "trouble-maker" whose voice and writing are spread all over the Internet.

Despite the amount of writing, public speaking and social media appearances I can lay claim to, I was actually a bit embarrassed to put it up in comparison with the epitome of the traditional scholar that Tan Sri was and is.

But never mind all that, the interesting and exciting thing was that we were going to be speaking about topics that concerned us both deeply: nation-building and unity.

Specifically, I was going to speak about how we citizens need to understand Malaysia's political culture before we can support the nation through our use of social media platforms and writing.

Tan Sri chose to talk about one of his favourite topics, the "Harmoni-Mesra" campus.

His choice of topic was telling. After all his contributions to science and after being appointed the country's first science adviser to a prime minister (in 1984, then advising different administra-

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MOHD  
TAJUDDIN  
MOHD RASDI



## Over the top

tions until 2001), Tan Sri chose to support Malaysia with a social value construct that would start on a university campus.

For a man of science – not social science, mind you, he began in veterinary science – to change direction and pronounce that the future of our country lies with the development of a social blueprint on a campus is, to my mind, near astounding.

In Malaysia, people of science, I have noticed, never change their skin and go to their graves with rigid "science" minds.

The social sciences seem unim-

portant to them.

Also, the funny thing was that I have long espoused the idea that nation-building must start with universities.

My approach is more philosophical and theoretical as well as spiritual and, dare I say, poetic.

I hold the idea of universal spirituality from my readings about many religions, and use anecdotal evidence from ordinary life to present the idea of treating each other with respect.

I have written about how we all share the same red blood, that our history is shared, and that we depend on each other socially, economically and spiritually.

My aim always is to spark thinking and discourse.

Tan Sri Omar's approach differs in that he does not waste time with theories or philosophies but uses foundations like the Rukun Negara and best practices of corporate and scientific activities to frame the importance of people accepting each other with

mutual respect.

He built a blueprint of his ideas in his own small housing community that he called Dialog Rakyat (Citizen's Dialogue).

From there, he ventured another blueprint with his Harmoni-Mesra campus at UCSI University.

We are different, but I believe we complement each other.

While Tan Sri has praised my writing, talks and ideas over the years, I always felt humbled in the face of his on-the-ground, working blueprints.

Compared with his rigorous work at the community and campus level, I am more of a theoretician, a poet speaking to people trapped in a jungle of hatred, mistrust and bigotry.

At the end of the day, what I wanted to take away from this moment, sharing our concern for the nation, was the idea that the university is a test of "nation first".

If we have academics, teachers

and students only caring about their subject disciplines, then the nation is lost.

The role of the university is to build humanity, not just worker bees.

Both Tan Sri Omar and I converge on the idea that faculties must give importance to this idea, and that all academics must answer the all-hands-on-deck clarion call.

Just look at the mob mentality of senseless demonstration after demonstration currently raising havoc in the country.

One demonstration wanted to destroy temples, another wanted to pull the prime minister down for no credible reason, and a recent one called for the sacking of a civil servant without waiting on due process.

Science and industry will never build up our nation on their own.

Only with an understanding of what truly makes values and history from religion, politics and culture will we be able to build trust and respect among different communities, and acceptance of each other's cultures.

In the end, it was a great honour to be a small shadow in the giant strides of a man who made an amazingly successful move from the discipline of science to the social aspects of humanity and human civilisation.

Kudos, Tan Sri Omar.

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### SUMMARIES

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