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From mere goals to big ideals

ONE of the secrets to Malaysia's success is its penchant for pursuing ideals instead of mere goals. It is this collective sense of prudent adventure that has seen it hit targets thought to be beyond the reach of developing countries like itself.

Examples are abundant; the nine consecutive years of 8-odd per cent growth is just one. The ideals it has been chasing have also made Malaysia a major manufacturing and trading nation, and one of the most competitive. It has its national car project, has put satellites in orbit, is a major contributor to instead of just a recipient of foreign direct investment, and a voice that has won respect in international forums such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. It has also achieved high-growth with low inflation and attained equitable growth among the various ethnic groups while maintaining racial harmony and unity. It is still chasing ideals. Its Vision 2020 to rank among the developed nations must be its biggest ideal, incorporating smaller ideals and goals from now until the year 2020.

One of these smaller goals is to penetrate as many markets in an open trading system that provides endless opportunities but whose rules are not too different from the rules of the jungle. To ensure continuous success, the country has to strive to grab these opportunities. This requires every Malaysian firm to treat itself, irrespective of its size and type, as a global organisation or company and not, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad described, a protected organisation that operates only in Malaysia. An organisation's management strategy should be able to produce products and services of quality which are accepted by the international community. The best way to realise this ideal would be to use quality standards recognised by most countries worldwide such as the series of standards within the ISO 9000.

This standard, called MS ISO9000 in Malaysia, is popular with the private sector. The ISO 9000 is crucial for the achievement of a marketing edge as it serves to prove that the quality of the management system and products of a company adhere to internationally-accepted standards. To date, more than 100 countries use the standards and more than 50,000 organisations have accepted them. For Malaysian companies, the ISO 9000 gives their products or services a competitive edge when the company plans to penetrate domestic and international markets. As a trading nation, Malaysian companies have to face prolonged competition from every corner of the globe. The open trade market is not only becoming the aspiration of all trade nations but is also opening up opportunities for emerging countries to become key players. Some 940 Malaysian companies have achieved the ISO 9000 certification and the number is expected to increase rapidly in the next few years.

But that is a mere goal. The ideal here is aiming to make the Malaysian public sector the first in the world to adopt the ISO 9000. Malaysia will not be the first country to have asked the public sector to pursue the ISO 9000. Several countries including the UK, the US, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada and New Zealand have already used the standards in certain agencies and departments. In Malaysia, several Government agencies have already acquired the ISO 9000 certification from the Standards Industrial and Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM) and several others are in the process of auditing. This proves that the ISO 9000 can be

adopted for use in all government agencies. To ensure effectiveness and efficiency in presenting services, the whole public services sector should adopt a quality management system that is based on universal quality standards.

The fulfillment of the ideal will be in seeing not just the private sector, but also the public sector in this country, achieving management standards and a product/service quality that is acknowledged worldwide. This is idealistic, but in Dr Mahathir's words, man, working towards an ideal, must achieve something close to that.

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