

14/04/1997

Societies can do more to boost British-Malaysian ties

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LAST week's conference and meeting of the Malaysia-British Society and the British-Malaysia Society seemed to have injected a new spirit into the two organisations.

Instead of talk of plans to dissolve the societies and letting life go on as usual, there is now a strong interest to take the role of the two societies to a new plane.

Perhaps the two major hiccups of the past between the two countries convinced their members that there was nothing much the two societies could have done to avoid them.

As things are more settled now, both societies have searched their souls and feel it is time for a new approach to make their existence worthwhile.

There are suggestions to expand the major activities of the societies beyond business and education into culture, sports and tourism. Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stated that there is a lot that the societies can do for them to be beneficial to both countries.

For example, bringing British students to study in Malaysian institutes of higher learning to enable them to understand the culture and dynamics of a multiracial society.

We all know there is always a large number of Malaysian students studying in Britain but seldom do we hear of British students going to Malaysian educational institutes to take up ordinary subjects so as to create a better understanding.

The same with culture. Other than the occasional comedy plays at Parkroyal Hotel, there is no effort to bring in the major ones that Malaysians flock to see when they are in Britain. Perhaps cost is a factor.

This is where the members of the two societies can work out some sort of a sponsorship to make it possible. The media, too, should attempt to include this in their range of activities since it is important for the British media to be better informed of Malaysia.

In his reply to a question, the Prime Minister suggested that their activities include the field of sports such as bringing in famous football clubs (minus the supporters, of course) to Malaysia.

In education and business, even if a good relationship between the two countries has already been established, there is always room for improvement.

Take for example the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). British investors may not wish to pass up the opportunity to participate in this new and exciting venture appropriately called Malaysia's gift to the world "where the full potential of the Information Age can be explored without any artificial limits".

According to Multimedia Development Corp chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah in his briefing to the members of the societies, to date 938 companies all over the world have agreed to participate in the MSC.

The MSC will revolutionise ways of doing business. With benefits such as freedom of ownership, freedom to source capital, intellectual property protection, world-class physical IT infrastructure, globally competitive telecommunications tariffs and service guarantees, it is difficult for companies involved in multimedia to resist the offer.

What clearly emerged from the two-day conference was that participation from members of the Malaysia-British Society is lacking.

Given the fact that a large number of Malaysians have graduated from British universities and colleges, the potential of expanding local participation is certainly very good.

Maybe getting a proper full-time secretariat is a good start by the Malaysian side in undertaking efforts to redefine the role of the society.

(This article represents the writer's personal views)

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