

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MALAYSIA (MFA) HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT POLICY (HRD): MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE ASEAN AND GLOBAL COMMUNITY

Mohd Yusof Ahmad

Abstract

Although critics may disagree, Malaysia's past and current diplomatic engagements with ASEAN and the global community have indeed been remarkable. Despite the marked absence of a well thought out formal diplomatic training strategy at independence, Malaysia's first generation diplomats have indeed done a great job at helping to shape the content and direction of this successful endeavour. The resultant regional stability had not only helped Malaysia to pursue her development agenda in the region un-interrupted, but also earned her high respect not only among her regional neighbors but also the global community. Recent changes in the regional and global environment, increased competitiveness and globalization however, have brought in new challenges that could upset this positive scenario. The development requires new HRD approaches on the part of the Malaysian foreign ministry to ensure Malaysia's next generation diplomats are equipped with the right competencies to successfully manage these challenges. Despite recent initiatives to address the issue, the lack of medium to long term strategic focus, sustained commitment and other structural constraints could stymie the process and adversely affect Malaysia's future standing within the region and beyond. A serious reappraisal of the foreign ministry's current HRD template is therefore critical if Malaysia's diplomacy is to be in tune with the complex dynamics of the future ASEAN and global community.

Keywords: human resource development, training, Malaysia foreign service, diplomacy

1. INTRODUCTION

There are as many definitions of the terms 'diplomacy' and 'training' and 'human resource development' as there are writers on the subject. Satow (1979) defined 'diplomacy' as 'the application of tact and intelligence to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states'. To Sir Harold Nicolson (1988), the term refers to 'the management of international relations by negotiation, the methods by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys, the business or art of the diplomatist.'¹ 'Training' and 'human resource development' too carry different meanings. For the purpose of this paper, 'training' will essentially refer to the process of knowledge and skills acquisition, and competencies, as a consequence of education and learning directed towards the pursuit of set organizational objective. The term 'human resource development' (HRD) is used to denote the policy framework that provides for the continuous value enhancement of human capital within an organization through a systematically planned and organized strategy.² As an integral part of the activity of an organization, the policy is often considered by management scholars as crucial for the success of any organization, public or otherwise.

In the field of diplomatic training, it is interesting to note that neither Satow nor Feltham (1996) or Nicholson have devoted any significant space in their tomes to the subject, formal or otherwise. This is despite the fact that those born with the natural qualities of a diplomat are indeed rare and far apart. For most, if not all, of today's diplomatic professionals, the craft of diplomacy has to be learned, the knowledge acquired and the skills honed through education, 'on-the-job' experience or in-service training programmes after joining the service. Given that reality, it is here argued that a well planned and organized formal training blue-print is critical for the foreign ministry to cater to this important need. The failure to do so can prove costly to the effective implementation of ministry policy at the ground level.

¹ See Booth, Gore, Lord., *Satow's Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, London New York, 1979; Nicolson, Harold, Sir., *Diplomacy*, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1988; Feltham, Ralph G., *Diplomatic Handbook*, Sixth Edition, Longman, London and New York, 1996; Wood, John, R. and Serres, Jean., *Diplomatic Ceremonial and Protocol*, Macmillan, London, 1970.

² Kelly, D., 2001, *Dual Perceptions of HRD: Issues for Policy, SMEs, Other Constituencies and the Contested Definitions of Human Resource Development*, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/26>; Nadler, L. Ed., *The Handbook of Human Resources Development*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1984.

In the context of Malaysia's diplomatic engagements with the world, the foreign ministry's human resource development (HRD) policy has evolved in tandem with Malaysia's political and economic progress in the last five decades since 1957. The policy, if there was one during the early years, was more informal in nature and represents the foreign ministry's ad hoc responses to immediate post-independence operational needs.³ Because of the ministry's young nature, it was understandable that a well thought out long-term HRD blueprint simply did not exist. From this rudimentary and humble beginning, however, the ministry's training policy subsequently evolved and developed into a more systematically organized planned activity, which first took shape under the Centre for International Relations and Diplomacy (CIRAD) within the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) in the early 80s.⁴

The trend witnessed another qualitative milestone in 1991 when the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) was established under the Prime Minister's Department to cater to the ministry's diplomatic training needs.⁵ This was followed by the creation of the Southeast Asia Regional Center for Counter-terrorism (SEARCCT) in September 2002 to provide for training, capacity-building and public awareness programmes on counter-terrorism.⁶ To be sure, the progression from the informal ad hoc approach of the early years to that of the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) more formal and organized HRD model of the 90s has indeed been remarkable. The fact notwithstanding, the process, it is argued, is far from complete. This is because new challenges have emerged over the horizon which require the adjustment of current human resource development practices to suit new conditions. This is so that Malaysia's next generation of diplomats could remain internationally competitive and relevant in the decades of the 21st Century.

³ Conversation with Tan Sri Datuk Zainal Abidin Sulong, Chairman MIDA and former Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, November 2008.

⁴ CIRAD was established at INTAN in 1980 with the objective of providing practitioner-oriented training programmes for officials from the foreign ministry and other public sector agencies with official representations overseas. The heads of CIRAD and a number of its teaching staffs were from the foreign ministry.

⁵ The Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) was established on 1 July 1991 following the dissolution of CIRAD in INTAN. Headed by a Director General, IDFR's staffs come from the foreign ministry. Although placed under the Prime Minister's Department at birth, the Institute officially became part of foreign ministry in March 2004. The Institute functions primarily as a Foreign Service institute. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia: From Putrajaya to the World*, 1980, p.45.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.46

The article thus proposes to examine the evolution and development of the foreign ministry's diplomatic training policy, hitherto referred to by the acronym 'HRD' over the last five decades of Malaysia's existence. In the paper, the terms 'training' and 'human resource development' are being used interchangeably for the sake of convenience and simplification. The survey is expected to reveal useful insights into the dynamics that underlie the evolution and development of the current policy over time, the factors shaping this policy, its strength, weaknesses, constraints, challenges, and prospects that confront the strategy, domestic and external, in the decades of the future. The study hopes to offer some suggestions as to what needs to be done to correct the current weaknesses in the system to ensure Malaysia's future interests are adversely affected by ongoing changes in the regional and global environment.

2. DIPLOMATIC TRAINING: THE EARLY FORMATIVE YEARS

As far as Malaysia's official relations with the rest of the world are concerned, the Malaysian foreign ministry (MFA), or Wisma Putra (WP), remained the primary agency tasked with overseeing the protection and promotion of Malaysia's national interest in the regional and global community.⁷ The Ministry's HRD policy, if defined in terms of a systematically organized long-term formal training programme for its diplomats, however, can at best only be described as basically rudimentary and reactive in nature during the early years following Malaysia's independence. Due to historical, structural, funding, practical and other constraints, the training of ministry officials was primarily done on an ad hoc reactive basis to meet the immediate operational needs of the newly established MFA.⁸

That fact notwithstanding, the emphasis on training for its diplomats to prepare them for duties abroad however is not entirely new to the foreign ministry. Tasked with the responsibility of conducting her post-independence foreign policy without the benefit of trained personnel and adequate resources, candidates were recruited directly from local and foreign universities, *sans* operational skills or specialized academic training. Immediate

⁷ Although recent years have witnessed the proliferation of representative offices of public sector agencies overseas such as Ministries of International Trade and Industries; Education; Tourism; Defense; Primary Industries etc., these do not carry the mandate of the foreign ministry as the official voice of the Malaysian state in international relations. In matters of the official stand of the Malaysian government, only the ambassador is legally acknowledged persona to speak on behalf of Malaysia. Members of other public sector agencies do not enjoy diplomatic status and immunities.

⁸ Op Cit (Zainal Abidin Sulong)

operational needs and the absence of local training institutions compelled new recruits to be trained mostly 'on-the-job' locally or abroad after short stints at foreign service schools in Australia, UK or the USA.⁹ The immediacy of operational needs, manpower constraints and funding shortfalls saw the neglect of the need for a systematically planned medium and long-term HRD strategy for the ministry until the establishment of CIRAD in INTAN in the early eighties.

As a formal part of the organizational activity of the foreign ministry, however, training has historically had at best a checkered past. The sending of new recruits for short training stints overseas notwithstanding, formal training never enjoyed a 'high priority' status within the ministry. The perspective can be attributed to several reasons. Because of more pressing day-to-day operational concerns that required immediate attention, formal HRD training was understandably seen as of secondary importance compared to other operational activities of the ministry. Resource, funding and manpower constraints also restricted the ministry's ability to release officers for longer term study breaks.¹⁰ The practicality of the 'on-the-job' approach to knowledge and skills acquisition was also another impediment to the adoption of the formal HRD approach to training. Practicality also dictated the preference for 'generalist' officers with multi-tasking competencies instead of 'specialist' ones. The latter group would require longer-term training plans and infrastructural support, which the ministry, given its infant status, was unable to provide. The lower priority given to HRD development was evident from the marked absence of a dedicated unit for training purposes within the ministry's organizational structure until the decades of the 90s. Interestingly, the strong institutional preference for the 'on the job' approach to training and preference for the 'generalist' over the 'specialist' model has remained a characteristic feature of the ministry's HRD strategy to the present.¹¹ The phenomenon could be attributed to the lack of serious commitment on the part of the ministry's leaderships to correct this institutional weakness.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ It is interesting to note that the Foreign Ministry Strategic Plan, 2009-2015, which was officially launched by the Foreign Minister in January 2009, was also silent on this issue. See *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Strategic plan, 2009-2015*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wisma Putra, Putrajaya, 2009.

3. INSTITUTIONALISATION OF HRD: INTAN AND IDFR

The first early attempt at providing a more systematically organized formal training programme for prospective candidates and serving foreign service officials locally was initiated in the early eighties with the setting up of the Center for International Relations and Diplomacy (CIRAD) at the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN).¹² New recruits for the Malaysian Administrative and Diplomatic Service (PTD) undergoing the basic pre-service training programme at INTAN were also required to cover a segment on international relations and diplomacy. The course, conducted at CIRAD, formed a mandatory component of the civil service training programme for entry into the Administrative and Diplomatic Service scheme (PTD) and subsequent deployment to the public sector.¹³

CIRAD's core business was to provide a more focused and intensive exposure to the theoretical and practical aspects of the field to these candidates to prepare them for absorption into the foreign ministry. Aside from this, the Centre's curriculum also covered practical-oriented in-service short courses designed to meet the operational needs of administrative staff and officials of the foreign ministry. The course topics covered diverse areas of political, diplomatic, consular and representational works at the ministry and abroad. They ranged from political, economic, consular and protocol functions to language competency training and spouses-related activities at overseas posts. Though located at INTAN, the teaching staffs at CIRAD, headed by a career diplomat, were serving officers from the foreign ministry. The course contents were dependent on ministry's requests and immediate needs.¹⁴ Aside from CIRAD, junior to mid-level ministry officials also continued to be sent overseas, albeit on a non-regular basis, for short in-service courses. Interestingly, except for a selected few, no serious attempts were made to send officers for post-graduate level training on a regular and

¹² Established in 1972, the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) is the training arm of the Public Service Department. Its core function is to develop human resource in the public sector through quality training for all levels of civil service employees. (www.intanbk.intan.my)

¹³ Prospective candidates into the Malaysian Civil Service were required to attend a mandatory diploma level basic training course at INTAN prior to acceptance into the Administrative and Diplomatic Service (PTD) scheme. The programme covered subject areas ranging from administrative, management, finance, development, international relations and diplomacy, to physical, spiritual and moral education. The segment on diplomacy at CIRAD also provided facilitators to talent scout prospective candidates for the foreign service. *Writer's personal experience as course facilitator/trainer at INTAN and CIRAD from 1981-1991.*

¹⁴ Contents of course curriculum at CIRAD were primarily designed to meet the special operational needs of the foreign ministry although participation from other public sector agencies such as Defence, Immigration, Tourism, Education etc. were also entertained.,

consistent basis. This was despite the yearly availability of scholarships from the Public Service Department (PSD) for that purpose.¹⁵

The next important milestone in the development of the Ministry's HRD policy occurred during the second decade of Tun Mahathir's administration. Malaysia's increased profile and more assertive diplomatic postures internationally under Mahathir's stewardship of the country's foreign policy and his Vision 2020 objectives necessitated the creation of more professionally trained diplomats to implement these policies abroad. Hence the conversion of CIRAD into the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR), a diplomatic training institute, in 1991 to fulfil that function. Placed directly under the Prime Minister's Department, IDFR's core business remained primarily the training of Malaysia's diplomat and other public sector officials directly and indirectly involved with promoting Malaysia's interest overseas.

The courses offered were primarily practitioner-oriented and designed specifically but not exclusively for the foreign ministry. The areas of focus cover functional skills in diplomacy, international relations and foreign language competencies. Aside from national participants, selected courses were also offered to diplomatic officials from ASEAN and other developing countries under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP)¹⁶ A research unit was added later to encourage policy-oriented research. In April 2004, IDFR was finally placed under the MFA, its rightful place, as a Foreign Service training institute. In July 2003, the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) was also established to focus on training and capacity building for local and foreign officials in the area of counter-terrorism and security.¹⁷ Hence by the first decade of the new Millennium, Foreign Service training in Malaysia had matured to a level of competency and status comparable to that of counterpart institutions in the more advanced countries.

¹⁵ The PSD offers scholarships for post-graduate studies at local and foreign universities to all public sector agencies, including the foreign ministry, regularly as part of its human resource development strategy to upgrade the skills of government employees. With few exceptions, response from the foreign ministry to these offers was less than encouraging. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the ministry only had its first Ph D holder in the late 70s, more than twenty years after Malaysia gained independence.

¹⁶ The programme was established in 1980 to provide technical assistance to developing countries through quality training. Funded by the Malaysian government, about 46 training institutions offer some 150 short-term courses to participants from 138 countries. Courses under the programme are also offered at IDFR since the Institute's establishment. Op Cit, *Strategic Plan*, 2009. See also <http://mtcp.epugov.my>

¹⁷ Op Cit, *Strategic Plan 2009*.

The transition from the early ad-hoc approach to training to that of the current HRD model has indeed been remarkable. Tun Mahathir's personal contribution towards the process has undeniably been most significant. It was under his period that a more systematically organized long-term HRD policy for the Malaysian diplomatic services was finally realized. To be sure, exposure to overseas training stints for its officers was never entirely abandoned. Junior and mid-career officials continued to be sent to UK, US and other developed countries for training exposures from time to time. But the establishment of IDFR drastically reduced Malaysia's historical overdependence on overseas training for its diplomats. Additionally it also enabled the foreign ministry to formulate longer-term training blueprint for its officials consistent with current and future national needs.

Progress was also visible in the area of post-graduate level training. By the late eighties and early nineties, marked efforts were made to send junior and mid-career officials for post-graduate level training at institutions of higher learning abroad and locally. The period thus saw the number of career diplomats with post graduate level qualification increased dramatically in the ministry. The fact notwithstanding, the preference for the 'generalist' over the 'specialist' approach to training remained unchanged. This could be attributed to a number of factors. Most junior and mid level trainees do not possess 'specialist orientation' in their academic and career background. Ministry officials tasked with training and recruitment functions too share a similar academic, experiential and institutional focus. Additionally, whilst awareness of the need to correct the institutional bias exists in the ministry, commitment remained lacking at the top management leadership level to rectify the situation. The latter ensured the continued perpetuation of the organisational bias. More importantly, the problem illustrates the potentially adverse unintended consequence of the absence of a robust HRD legacy on institutional behaviour.

Yet despite the remarkable progress, much work remains to be done. Major problems in the form of lack of commitment, bureaucratic inertia, structural, manpower and funding constraints, however, remained. These factors often impede the effective implementation of the Ministry's HRD vision and objectives at the operational level. In an environment of rapid regional and global changes and increased uncertainties, the problems, if not resolved, could

adversely affect Malaysia's regional and global interests in the future. A brief survey of some of the new regional and global challenges confronting her at this juncture will perhaps highlight more clearly the type of measures that should be taken in the area of the ministry's human capital development to ensure Malaysia's next generation of diplomats will be equally successful in managing the complex demands of the future regional and global community.

4. THE CHALLENGE OF A CHANGED ENVIRONMENT

The fact that continuous training forms a critical determinant of peak organizational performance is beyond dispute. The same argument, it can be said, is also true for the Malaysian diplomatic sector. Given the rapid changes taking place in regional and international diplomacy, foreign ministries can only choose to ignore this fact at their own risks. With the ending of the cold war, rapid advancement in information and communication technology, globalization and the emergence of non-state actors in international relations, many traditional diplomatic principles, practices, methods, values and norms have also come under increasing pressure to adapt to these changes to remain relevant. As a consequence, foreign ministries, including Malaysia's, must be willing to revisit their respective HRD principles and practices in order to remain in tune with the needs of the time.

Not only are newer skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to cope with these developments, diplomats must also be willing to learn, unlearn and relearn new concepts and strategies, change current practices and adopt new norms if they are to successfully manage these complex and varied challenges.¹⁸ For the foreign service of small developing countries like Malaysia, the task can indeed be daunting. A brief survey of these new developments and the challenges they pose to traditional diplomatic principles and practices would perhaps illustrate the point more clearly. Among the challenges confronting Malaysia's future diplomats in these respects, would include the following:

5. PROLIFERATION OF NON-STATE ACTORS

The post-cold war world has witnessed the dramatic growth on many new states. Totalling more than 200 today, they no doubt remained the key actors in international relations, despite

¹⁸ For a good discussion on the subject see Riordan, Shaun, *The New Diplomacy*, Polity Press, UK, 2003.

predictions to the contrary.¹⁹ The fact notwithstanding, the post Cold war era has also spawned many new non-state entities in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Numbering some 40,000 world-wide, their activities cover wide range of issues from human rights and the environment to climatic change. Increasingly vocal and aggressive, they neither represent the governments nor the business community.²⁰ Given their increasingly bold actions in pursuit of their respective interests, no members of the diplomatic community can ignore their capacity to disrupt normal inter-state diplomacy. Yet most conventionally trained diplomats, including Malaysia's, are least trained or equipped to effectively deal with these entities internationally.

6. CHANGING ROLE OF DIPLOMATS

Recent changes in the international environment have also witnessed the increased role of economics, trade, finance and trans-national corporate actors in international relations. The use of economics and trade as tools or weapons of diplomacy, though not new, has also become increasingly prominent in contemporary diplomatic life. For a small trade dependent nation like Malaysia, the factor could be critical to the country's national development agenda. These developments require that proper attention be given to such issues in the career development and training policy of its officials, particularly diplomatic personnel tasked with safeguarding Malaysia's national interests abroad.

Yet due to historical and other constraints, Malaysian diplomatic officials are less than equipped to deal with these entities. Structured on the traditional politico-security template, work at the ministry has remained heavily biased towards traditional political, security, ceremonial, consular and representational functions. The domain of international economics, trade, business and finance continued to be seen as falling within the purview of the Ministry of International Trade and Industries (MITI) or other economic related agencies of the Malaysian government. The lower emphasis given to economic matters is graphically reflected in the ministry's organizational structure over the last five decades which remained strongly biased towards political rather than economic matters. Despite attempts at reform,

¹⁹ See Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguins, London, 1992; Cooper. R., *The Post Modern State and the World Order*.

²⁰ Edwards, Michael., *NGO Rights and Responsibilities*, The Foreign Policy Center, London, 2000

especially under Tun Mahathir's administration, this historical bias has remained unchanged.

7. CHANGED NATURE OF 'THREAT' AND 'SECURITY'

The events of 911, for instance, have shattered the myth of security based entirely on the superiority of conventional and nuclear forces. While the development has not eliminated the importance of traditional politico-strategic and military calculus from inter-state relations, the development has fundamentally redefined the concepts of 'threat' and 'security' in inter-state relations. As a consequence, both terms have acquired more complex manifestations. The real dangers of economic warfare, chemical-biological weapons, terrorism, trans-national crimes, AIDS, climatic change and global pandemics are but some examples of the new 'threat', and 'security' issues confronting future diplomatic works. Given the unconventional nature of these challenges, the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to deal with them would require quite different approaches and perspectives from those most familiar with traditional diplomats. The task confronting Malaysia's diplomatic training establishment in this respect therefore is quite daunting.

8. GLOBALISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Thomas Friedman in his book 'The World is Flat' has argued that the world is truly fast becoming a global village due to the phenomenal growth of world trade, increased economic interconnectivity amongst nations, rapid advancement in information and communication technology (ICT) and the internet.²¹ Because of these developments, the impact of events, both positive and negative, will be felt by all across the globe regardless of their size and distance. The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the current global economic and financial meltdown provide graphic examples of this point. Yet many traditionally trained diplomatic personnel, are the least skilled to understand, pre-empt, manage or maximize benefits from the phenomena. As front line defenders of the country's interest abroad, Malaysia's diplomats must not only be sensitive to the impact of the phenomena on Malaysia's national development agenda but also skilled in the art of managing them to promote the country's interests in the regional and international community.

²¹ Friedman, Thomas., *The World is Flat*, Penguin Books, London, 2006; Lexus and the Olive Tree, Harper Collins Publishers, 2000.

9. THE NEW MEDIA

The role of the Western media, electronic and written, in shaping public opinion is acknowledged by all. With the rise in the power of the Western press and given their penchant for sensationalism, coverage of events, particularly in the developing world, have been historically negative and biased. Live coverage of events from the battle fields, refugee camps, conference halls and street corners that reaches into the living rooms of millions globally by such networks as CBS, NBC, Fox, BBC and CNN best illustrate the aggressive power of the western media to conduct public diplomacy over the heads of diplomats and their governments.²² Yet, most traditional diplomatic personnel are least trained to deal with the medium. Entrenched mutual distrust between the public sector and the media, local and foreign, has also impeded the potential for more positive relationships between them. The Malaysian diplomats' continued lack of competency in the art of managing the media in an age of 'news without borders' can only further enhance Malaysia's vulnerability to their continued bias reporting on Malaysia in the international community to the detriment of the country's interest.

10. GOOD GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The demise of the Cold War and the triumph of liberal democracy have also witnessed increased Western pressure on the developing world, particularly on such issues as gender equality, good governance, human rights, freedom of speech, sustainable development, the environment etc. The phenomena have placed added burden on traditional diplomacy. Since the target of these pressures is primarily the developing world, Malaysian diplomatic personnel must therefore be better trained to effectively manage and counter Western criticisms of Malaysia's stands on these issues overseas. Given efforts to link these issues to development aid and assistance to the developing world, the need to adequately train diplomatic personnel in these areas cannot be understated.

11. TERRORISM AND TRANS-BOUNDARY CRIME

Since the event of 911, the problem of terrorism has assumed global proportion in terms of lethality, spread, involvement and impact. The US subsequent 'War on Terrorism' strategy

²² Schirato, Tony and Webb, Jen., *Understanding Globalisation*, Sage Publication, London, 2003, pp 161-185.

has also spawned new doctrines and patterns of behavior designed to counter the phenomenon globally. The development has had fundamental impact on traditional modes of diplomatic norms and behavior, often with potentially dire consequences for the survival of small states like Malaysia. The implication of doctrines such as hegemonism, unilateralism, pre-emptive defence, terrorist states, humanitarian intervention etc., on the traditional notions of statehood, independence, sovereignty, 'non-interference' etc., needs to be better understood by diplomatic officials. Given that these issues will not go away any time soon, it is imperative that future diplomats be adequately trained and their knowledge, skills and understanding of these issues enhanced to better safeguard Malaysia's interest abroad. The cost of failure to do so can be costly to Malaysia's future standing in the international community.

12. CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-BOUNDARY ISSUES

The emerging borderless world, economic inter-dependency, increased communication, trade and travel between and among nations have in turn resulted in greater contacts between different cultures, belief systems and traditions. The phenomenon has also increased the potential for conflict between and among different states, nations, ethnic groups and cultures.²³ Rapid advancement in science and technology and the growth of many new development regions have also accentuated the problems of pollution, crime, mass migration, diseases, etc across borders. The resolution of these issues however, is beyond the ability of any single nation. Their effective management would require multilateral collaborative efforts across traditional frontiers and diplomatic norms. Diplomatic training institutions therefore have to take into account these new dimensions of contemporary international relations in their human resource development curriculum if future diplomats are expected to be more effective in managing them.

13. THE ICT REVOLUTION

The advent of the Internet and rapid advances in the ICT sector continue to have significant impact on the role, function and modus operandi of contemporary diplomats. The speed and

²³ See Huntington, Samuel P., 'The Clash of Civilisations?' in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 72, No 3, Summer 1993 pp 22-49; Andrej, Tuscisny, 'Civilisational Conflicts : More Frequent, Longer, and Bloodier?' In *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 41, No 4, 2004, pp 485-498

breadth of coverage of today's information exchange and their instant accessibility through the Internet, You Tube, blogosphere is indeed a boon to diplomatic work, particularly for policy decision and training purposes. But the advantage can only be forthcoming if diplomats are IT literate. The latter unfortunately requires heavy capital investments not only in technological infrastructure but also in HRD policy, a luxury often less available in the developing world. The situation placed diplomats from these countries at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their colleagues from the more developed world. It is therefore imperative that foreign service institutions, including Malaysia's, take cognizance of this fact in the formulation of its HRD policy.

14. GENERATIONAL SHIFT IN DIPLOMATIC PLAYERS

The advent of the new millennium notwithstanding, many traditional diplomatic habits, behavior and norms have remained unchanged. Hence the continuation of wars, conflicts and crises in the international community. But the 21st Century is also witness to the emergence of a new generation of diplomatic players. Besides being the direct beneficiaries of new technological inventions, however, they do not share the same values or memories of the preceding generation's historical dynamics. There is therefore an urgent need to adapt current practices, thinking processes and training approaches to the emerging values and norms of the new generation. Diplomatic training institutions have a significant role to play in this respect to fulfil this need.

15. CONSTRAINTS

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, the challenges facing the Malaysian diplomatic establishment are indeed varied and complex. Efforts to deal with them would require current institutional players to think outside the box and adopt new training paradigms that are more in tune with the needs of the time. Given embedded institutional habits shaped by past precedent-based thinking, the task is far from easy. The problem is further compounded by numerous institutional, structural, funding, systemic, personnel and other constraints. For the Malaysian foreign ministry, resource limitation and the lack of funds have become major impediments to the ability to quickly adapt to rapid changes in the environment and the implementation of advanced training paradigm for the organization. Additionally, rising costs

and frequent budgetary cuts also prevent the formulation and implementation of a more robust longer-term HRD policy.

The low priority given to training, particularly during periods of budgetary cut, also places the HRD department at a handicap compared to other operational units within the ministry. The situation impedes the development of a comprehensive longer-term HRD strategy that is dynamic and sustainable over time. The constant lack of quality manpower is another major constraint facing Malaysia's diplomatic training establishment. While to maintain a permanent staff of trainers would incur heavy costs, outsourcing such resources from the open market too can be equally expensive. The low monetary incentives offered to these individuals based on the government's approved rates, has also not helped to improve the situation. Additionally, the lack of sufficient infra-structural support from other public and private sector agencies also works against the implementation of a more dynamic and quality-based training programmes for her diplomatic officials. The ministry's current HRD approach and model therefore need serious rethinking and adaptation if it is to successfully manage the demands of the future regional and global community.

16. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE? SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding the continuing prevalence of traditional practices in contemporary diplomacy, the diplomatic world has also witnessed dramatic changes in more recent time.²⁴ While the traditional consular, reporting, representational and ceremonial aspects of diplomatic work have remained unchanged, new elements in terms of content, direction and expectations have also emerged over the years. The development has compelled the diplomatic community to revisit current practices and methodologies in the effort to cope and adjust to these changes. For Malaysia's diplomatic professionals in particular, the ability to adjust quickly to these changes can be of critical importance to the nation. As the primary player in the implementation of the country's foreign policy interests abroad, the burden for ensuring the successful pursuit of these objectives falls heavily on the foreign ministry and its core group of professional diplomats. In this respect, the foreign ministry's HRD policy has a critical role to play in providing the opportunity for the group to be adequately trained and

²⁴ See Riordan (2003)

equipped with the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude to enable them to perform these duties effectively overseas.

17. NEW EXPECTATIONS FOR MALAYSIA'S FUTURE DIPLOMAT

Given that Malaysia is a trading nation with heavy dependence on foreign trade, what then are some of the new expectations, qualities, skills and attitudes required of her future diplomats? What should be the criteria for admission into the profession given the fast changing context and content of contemporary diplomacy? Given the increased importance of international trade and globalization, should Malaysia's future diplomats also be 'professional salesperson' for the country, or should they just play their traditional role as 'postman'? Should they continue to focus primarily on 'bilateralism' or should they also develop 'multi-lateral' competency? Should Malaysia's future diplomats be just 'generalist' or should they also be trained as 'specialists', 'leaders', 'visionaries' and 'global corporate managers'? Should Malaysia's future diplomats discontinue their traditional role as mediators, negotiators and cultured individuals or must they also be IT experts in order to be effective and competitive? To be sure, there is no one right or clear answer to these questions. But what is clear and certain is that given the dramatic changes that have occurred in the international community, diplomatic training establishments and institutions everywhere must be willing to constantly revisit their HRD policies to ensure that their diplomats remain relevant and in tune with the needs of the time. In this respect, the Malaysian foreign service is no exception.

18. SOME ADDITIONAL QUALITIES TO CONSIDER

The special skills, competencies and qualities required of the traditional diplomatist are well highlighted by scholars such as Feltham, Satow, Nicholson and others.²⁵ However, given the dramatic changes that have taken place as highlighted in the preceding pages, one thing is very clear. Future diplomats must also possess new skills, knowledge, qualities and attitudes besides traditional ones if they are to function more effectively in the future. In this context, the same imperative may be said of the training needs of the next generation of Malaysia's

²⁵ See Satow (1979), Feltham (1993), Nicholson (1988).

diplomats. To remain relevant in the coming decades, the ministry must therefore also give serious attention to the following areas in its diplomatic training curriculum for the group.

The observations, however, have two important caveats. First, they do not in any way suggest that the ministry's current human resource development initiative is entirely devoid of efforts in the direction. To be sure, some of the identified subject areas are being addressed in past and current programmes. What may be lacking, however, are clearer strategic focus and sustained consistency and commitment in the implementation of these programmes. Second, new initiatives may already be in motion to look into these needs, which the writer is not privy to. The recently launched MFA strategic plan, for instance, did highlight the ministry's focus on some of these needs. But again, the real issue here is to see serious commitment and sustained follow-up at the implementation level. And third, the subject areas highlighted in the paper are merely tentative and not exhaustive in nature. The suggestions are meant to further fine-tune those that already exist while highlighting new ones deemed appropriate with the needs of the time.

19. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS

A higher level of both the skill is critical for future diplomats to function more effectively in the increasingly globalised and competitive international environment. Leadership and corporate management skills at mid and senior levels are critical and necessary to inspire and motivate team members to deliver quality services benchmarked on the highest international quality and leadership standards. In this respect, diplomatic personnel must be subject to qualitative and quantitative performance accountability to their stakeholders to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in their delivery skills, at home and abroad.

19.1 Marketing Skills

Traditionally, salesmanship and marketing skills have not been considered the domain of the Malaysian diplomats' core duties. But given rapid globalization and Malaysia's emphasis on strengthening her economic competitiveness internationally, competency in these areas, in addition to their other traditional functions, can be an invaluable asset to all future diplomats. These skills can significantly assist the diplomat to penetrate new non-traditional markets, attract new investments and promote home

country attractiveness among investors from targeted countries. Exposure to marketing strategies, tactics and methodologies over and above traditional diplomatic skills should therefore be an integral part of the diplomatic training curriculum from the lowest to highest levels in the diplomatic profession. The foreign service training models of countries such as Australia and Canada, which combined diplomatic and commercial duties into one, could be instructive in this respect. Whilst the presence of trade, investment and marketing officials from other agencies in some overseas stations could fulfil this need, in many new targeted markets, the responsibility falls solely on the foreign ministry personnel. Lack of competency in this area can be an impediment to the effective performance of their trade and investment duties abroad.

19.2 Multi-lingual and Multi-disciplinary Competencies

Competency in multiple languages and disciplines though not new, has become more critical in today's regional and global diplomacy. Here the traditional mastery of the English language alone is not enough. The emergence of non-European economies such as China, India, the Middle East, Latin America and other Asia-Pacific countries as alternative markets and sources of investments have also enhanced the economic value of the languages of these areas. Given Malaysia's over-dependence on exports and international trade, skills in these area languages can give Malaysia's diplomatic personnel a critical edge over other competitors in the promotion of Malaysia's economic, development and trade interests overseas. Malaysia's multi-cultural assets can be optimized in this respect to pursue this objective. What is needed is a more focused longer term strategic approach in the ministry's foreign language training policy to meet this need. Exposures to cross-disciplinary approaches in the learning and training environment should also be adopted to deter compartmentalized thinking among agencies at the operational level.

19.3 Cross-cultural Skills

Given the likelihood of greater cross-cultural contacts among nations in the future because of globalization, expertise in cross-cultural communications would indeed be an invaluable asset to all future diplomats. As the very nature of foreign service would require diplomats to operate in alien cultures, cross-cultural communication skills can

enhance the effectiveness of the diplomatic agent operating in a different socio-cultural milieu. Given the fact of inherent differences between 'eastern' and 'western' values; Muslim and non-Muslim traditions; 'European' and 'non-European' systems, sensitivity towards the culture and belief system of others is therefore critical to the core function of the diplomat. An 'open mind' should thus be the necessary pre-requisite for candidates intending to join the diplomatic service. Courses in cross-cultural management skills must therefore form a mandatory part of the training curriculum of future Malaysian diplomatic personnel to enhance their effectiveness at posts overseas.

19.4 A 'Win-win' Team Player

There should be a fundamental shift in the operational perspectives of diplomats engaged in doing business across borders. The current tradition-based 'zero-sum' operating principle, historically identified with traditional diplomacy, must be changed to the more positive 'win-win' model. The *liet motif* of the diplomat, as a peace builder and negotiator, should be to strive for 'mutual gains' rather than just the pursuit of one side's self-interest. Given the focus on mutual gain, the 'win-win' template is more conducive to conflict resolution and long term inter-state stability compared to the 'self-interest' model. In an age of increased transnational problems requiring multi-state collaborations to resolve, the superiority for the 'win-win' strategy in future regional and global community is self-evident.

19.5 Corporate Mindset

Traditional diplomats have been historically biased in their analytical and functional competencies towards a political-security and strategic framework based on *real politic*. Economics and business interests, or 'low politics' have always been subservient to the dictates of 'high politics' in the relations among nations. With the ascendancy of the trade and economics as an important determinant in contemporary diplomacy, the need has become urgent for diplomats to also be more 'business minded' in their perspective of their expected role overseas. The success of the Malaysia Incorporated concept overseas, for instance, is predicated on this assumption. A lack of sensitivity and understanding of this reality among Malaysia's

diplomatic personnel could undermine the implementation of the policy. This change in mindset is necessary if the interest of the Malaysian corporate and business sector is to be more effectively served by Malaysia's future diplomatic agents overseas.

19.6 Media Savvy

With the growing influence and power of the media in public diplomacy, it is imperative for diplomats to be also adequately trained in media management competency. In an age of transparency, news without borders and real time live coverage of events across time zones, the inability of diplomatic personnel to manage the media can prove detrimental to the country's interest. Lack of competency, particularly in areas considered sensitive to the country, for instance, could do damage to Malaysia's image and reputation in the international community. Conversely, being media trained could enable Malaysia's diplomatic agents to use the media to further Malaysia's development agenda in the international community. The western media's monopoly of this practice in contemporary international relations best illustrates the advantages that could be gained from mastery of the asset by the diplomatic community. Competency in media management must therefore form a mandatory part of the diplomatic training curriculum for mid to top level foreign service personnel.

19.7 Competency in Multi-lateral Diplomacy

Notwithstanding the continuing importance of bilateral diplomacy in international relations, contemporary diplomacy is witnessing the increasing importance of multilateralism in resolving many trans-boundary issues that affect multiple states. These issues cover a broad spectrum from trade and finance to the environment and traditional strategic-security matters. The trend towards further proliferation of these types of issues necessitates the need for diplomats with special expertise in areas such as multilateral diplomacy, Summitry, regional and global diplomacy. Within the context of the foreign ministry, this suggests the early selection, strategic placement and continuous training of prospective candidates for the purpose over extended time in their career development plan. The strategy would require a dramatic change in the

ministry's current training preference of producing only 'generalist' officers based on short-term strategic thinking.

19.8 IT Literacy

The use of IT as an enabling tool of diplomacy is fast becoming a necessity. Its increasing use by diplomats in their daily tasks has made it imperative for all future diplomats to be IT literate and competent. Its neglect can place diplomatic agents at a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis their counterparts from other countries in their daily operation abroad. Here the use of the Internet for e-training purposes by the foreign ministry should be seriously considered. Its easy accessibility across great distances and different time zones provide a practical solution to the perennial problem of bringing home diplomatic officials from overseas for mandatory training in Malaysia at high costs.

19.9 Crisis-management and Negotiation Skills

Given the non-likelihood of a conflicts free world anytime soon, skills in crisis management and negotiation are of crucial importance for future diplomatic works. Competency in these fields, which also represent the core of traditional diplomatic work, must form a mandatory part of the training curriculum of mid to senior level officers in the ministry. The acquisition of such skills should be pegged to officials' promotional advancement in the diplomatic career.

19.10 The 'Specialist' Diplomat

A scheme for the creation of 'specialist' diplomats covering issues/subjects of critical importance to Malaysia's national interest has never been a part of the ministry's training plan since independence. The continuing preference for 'generalist' officers has ensured continued neglect of this important need to the present day. This lacuna should be plugged. Given Malaysia's increasingly assertive international profile and active global presence, the time has come for the ministry to seriously begin the process of training 'specialist' besides 'generalist' officers. The initiative will benefit Malaysia as it would reduce Malaysia's over-dependence on external sources for such need. A glaring case in point is in the area of international and territorial laws. Given

the many still unresolved bilateral and overlapping territorial claims between Malaysia and her ASEAN and non-ASEAN neighbour, the consequence of this neglect could prove costly to the nation. Malaysia's recent loss of Batu Putih to Singapore is a case in point. Malaysia's dire lack of specialists in this respect, is quite worrisome. The shortcoming should therefore be rectified urgently. Here the Ministry's HRD policy can play a key role to fulfil the need.

20. CONCLUSION

As discussed in the preceding pages, the role of the traditional diplomat has indeed undergone significant changes in contemporary international relations. In some areas the changes have been dramatic while in others incremental. What ever the degree, the traditional role of the diplomat as a key player in the promotion of a state's interest in the global community has remained unchanged. This is despite evidence of visible erosion of their privileges and growing competition from new actors in the international community. For trade dependent-nations like Malaysia, her diplomatic service has played a significant role in ensuring Malaysia's interests were not adversely affected by changes in the external environment since independence. Their success, to a great extent, can be attributed to the foreign ministry's early emphasis on training, formal and informal, of its professional staff despite tremendous funding, manpower and resource constraints.

The last five decades too have witnessed the ministry's HRD policy matured over time. From the rudimentary ad hoc model of the early years, the policy has matured into the more organized, systematic and focused activity as manifested by IDFR's comprehensive training curriculum today. The process has moved in tandem with Malaysia's own transition from an agriculture and commodity-based country to an advanced developing economy and an active diplomatic player internationally. The fact notwithstanding, recent new trends in the international community have also brought in new challenges, which require new approaches at the policy level to ensure her future diplomatic professionals remained in tune with the needs of the time. For the Malaysian Foreign Service, the need is most critical given Malaysia's over-dependence on foreign trade and investments for growth and development. A serious re-look at the MFA's current HRD practices is therefore not only timely but also urgent to ensure Malaysia's next generation of diplomats remained as relevant, dynamic,

robust and competitive as that of the predecessor generation. Neglect of this imperative will not only adversely affect Malaysia's future high standing within ASEAN and the international community, but also ensure that her diplomatic service will be less prepared to manage the complex and varied challenges of the future regional and global community.

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dryusof@gmail.com