

# LIMITING MARA'S ROLE NOT GOOD FOR BUMIS

**T**HERE is an uproar among Bumiputeras over the new Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) council's attempt to limit Mara's role to education, pushing its entrenched role in socio-economic development to a minor position.

Explicitly declared by Mara chairman and implicitly expressed by a budget allocation of RM3 billion to education and a mere RM16 million to entrepreneurial development, it is a big departure from the Mara Act 1966 and the aspiration of the Bumiputera Economic Congress in 1965, which gave life to that act.

The target of this uproar is new Mara chairman Dr Hasnita Hashim, who claims that she has not seen the act.

Mara, as a body, has an emotional connection to Bumiputeras and an even stronger one with rural communities.

The move by the council to end Mara's involvement in the commercial sector and the attempt to stifle Mara Corporation's (Mara Corp) role appear to have negligible political risks.

Recently, I met former Universiti Teknologi Mara pro-chancellor Tan Sri Arshad Ayub, and Malaysian Aerospace Industry Association president Naguib Mohd Nor, who concur that there are diamonds in the rough in the Mara group of companies in the aviation industry.

Strand Aerospace Malaysia, a leading Airbus- and Boeing-approved engineering design and analysis provider in the region, has been designing wing and fuselage components for manufacture in Europe and Malaysia since 2006.

It is now working for Dornier in Germany to revive the design of Seastar, an amphibious transport aircraft. Asia Aerotechnic, the reincarnation of the world-renowned MAS Aerospace Engineering, is another potential.

Together with the Malaysian Institute of Aerospace Technology (UniKL MIAT), operated by former MAE top guns, they form Malaysia's potential thrust into the global aviation industry.

Some argue that they may



Strand Aerospace Malaysia, an engineering design and analysis provider in the region, is a Mara company. FILE PIC

threaten Bumiputera enterprises in this field, but this ignores how wide and varied the aviation maintenance industry is that no enterprise could handle its potential alone.

These companies demonstrate how the economic industry and entrepreneurial developments, and education are spearheaded by Mara and Mara Corp in concert. This developmental formula is enshrined in the Mara Act.

The removal of the Mara formula in the manner that the council has announced may have decreased the value of its investment and threatens its underlying activities, including the award-winning consultation, maintenance repair operations and world-class technical and vocational education and training that delivers certified aircraft technicians.

In short, the companies would have little value without Mara's support formula, except, of course, to non-Bumiputeras, who have access to other sources.

The aviation industry could, in the long term, be a new path for Malaysia and Bumiputeras to enter the technological field, but instead is under threat by the council.

Yes, profitability matters in business, but Mara companies were not created to make profit as their goal.

Their key goal is to drive socio-economic development and build industries, including promoting commercial opportunities for budding Bumiputera entrepreneurs.

The council's move will only result in a negative contribution to the Bumiputera economic agenda.

The question is, what is the real commitment of the government and the new Mara to increase Bumiputeras' share of the economy?

The next few months will show whether they have made a mistake.

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