

Futures Literacy imperative in predicting next pandemic



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - October 4, 2021 @ 4:43pm



In short, it is a capability that can be nurtured to allow people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do. - NSTP file pic

THE International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) won another prestigious accolade on Sept 30.

It is the Unesco/Unitwin Chair on Future Studies: Anticipation for Sustainability and Wellbeing, the only one on the theme, joining a network of some 170 of the University Chairs included in the programme.

Likewise, it serves as a think tank and as a bridge builder between academia, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making.

According to Unesco, in areas suffering from a dearth of expertise, Chairs and Networks have evolved into poles of excellence and innovation at the regional or sub-regional levels.

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It also promotes international inter-university cooperation and networking to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge sharing and collaborative work in key priority areas related to Unesco's fields of competence.

Collectively, they contribute to strengthening North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.

The theme "sustainability" and "wellbeing" in the context of the futures are indeed very relevant given the uncertainties and complexities that the world is thrown into even long before toxic pandemic emerges.

The theme has come to focus several decades but not taken up in seriousness due to the lack of "futures literacy".

That is, the absence of "a universally accessible skill that builds on the innate human capacity to imagine the future, offers a clear, field tested solution to poverty-of-the-imagination."

In short, it is a capability that can be nurtured to allow people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do.

"Being futures literate empowers the imagination, enhances our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur," according to Unesco.

Like reading and writing literacies, futures can be acquired as a skill to become more adept at 'using-the-future', and to be more 'futures literate.' This is possible because of two factors: namely, the future does not yet exist; it can only be imagined. And humans have the ability to imagine.

To quote the management guru, Peter Drucker: "The best way to predict the future is to create it." Meaning, humans are able to learn to imagine, thus predicate, the future for a variety of reasons and in different ways especially on becoming more 'futures literate'.

In a world plagued by looming ambiguities ranging from climate change, economic crisis, social exclusion and distancing, racism, inter-generational tensions, which tend to threaten sustainability and wellbeing, futures literacy become more indispensable to usher in more "confidence" and be "assured" on the next step towards the future with some silver linings.

Creating hope can be a powerful push towards building a future without which it will remain bleak shrouded by despair and frustration. Such is the case today, due to the pandemic that is threatening humanity like never before.

More so when the episodes of mental ill-health are on an unprecedented rise globally.

The IIUM Chair holds a unique place because it emphasises on spirituality as the framework for sustainability and wellbeing in a holistic way. The



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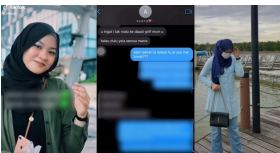
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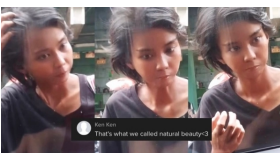
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trajectory for the future.

Therein the indigenous concept of sejahtera is modelled as the framework to anticipate the future in an inside-out mode. As envisaged by Unesco, this is enabled "through structured on-the-ground learning-by-doing activities people from all walks of life and all ages learn about the origins and power of what they imagine.

By delving together into topics they care about, from the future of health and well-being to the future of jobs and gender, they undertake learning voyages that enable them to source their hopes and fears in their history, culture, context and aspirations."

At the same time, it opens up new connectivity of human heritage across cultures that connects the dots interculturally in establishing a universal stage for collective change as a potent transformative action for the imagined futures.

As noted by Albert Einstein: "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution."

Everyone has the capability to imagine, and to it turn into reality, since every material invention created by the human mind was first (re)imagined.

Futures literacy can facilitate the process to address the urgent need to transform human governance by empowering the human soul as the force in anticipating the future.

In so doing, the IIUM Chair is proposing a new Sustainable Development Goal - SDG 18: Spirituality and Leadership so that use-the-future can be more meaningful and impactful.

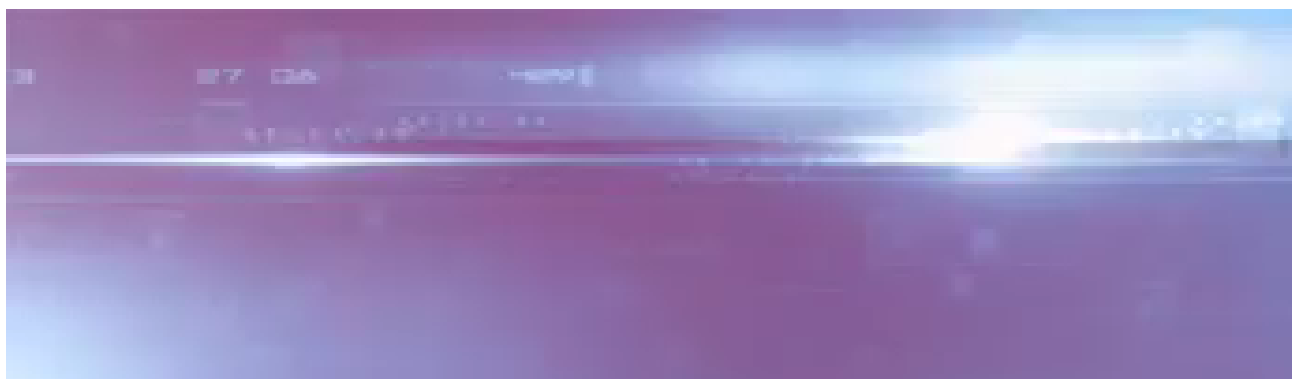
This is not just about understanding how to prepare for potential crises or plan how to overcome grand challenges but to realise the important goals of Agenda 2030.

It is about moving beyond a dependency on the illusion of certainty and the fragility that is created.

It is expected that the IIUM Chair will align to Unesco stance to develop its own 'laboratory of ideas' where people can have higher awareness as to why and how they can use the future through action-learning and collective intelligence to co-create sejahtera (sustainability and wellbeing) towards peaceful living in humility while shaping the desired future sans another pandemic.

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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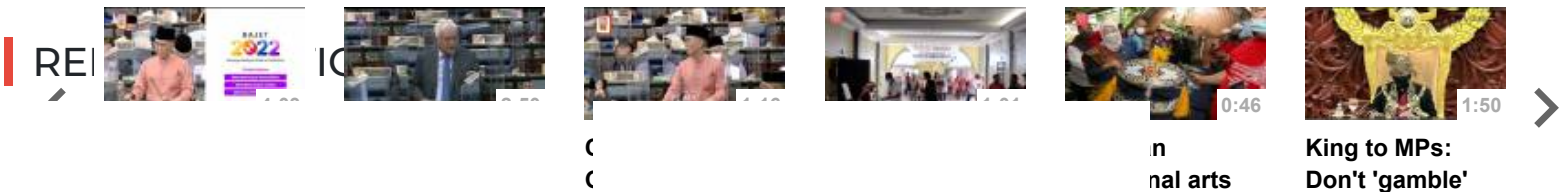
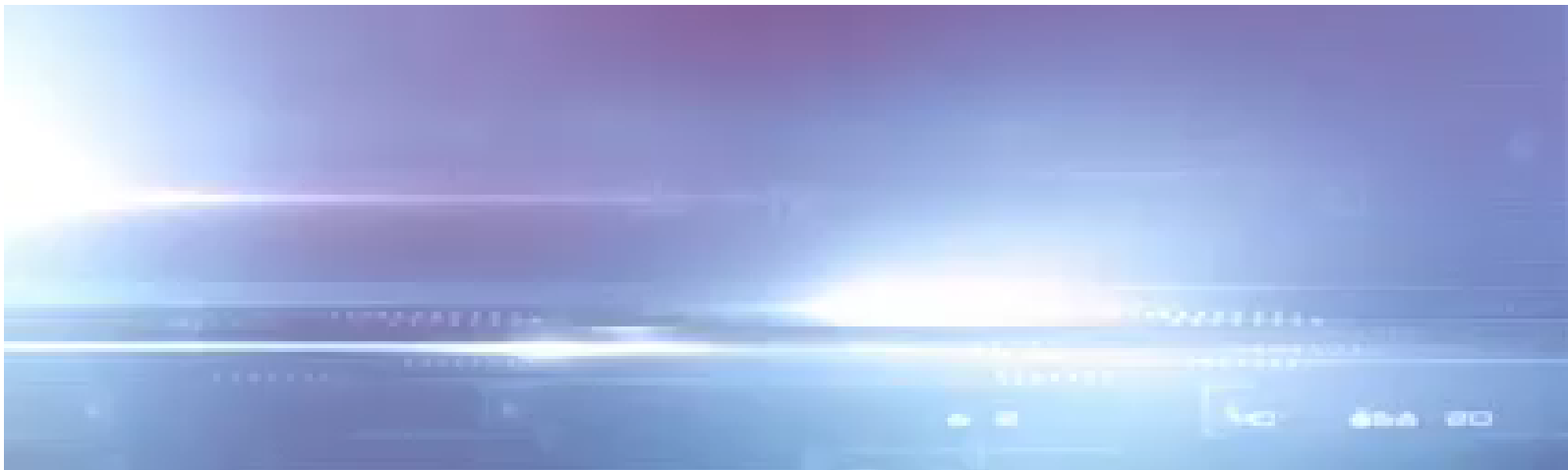
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