

It must be stated that the whole world is experiencing a shortage of engineering and related employment skills which can be employed in basic infrastructure development and building works. Given this, the attraction of “competent” human resources is obviously towards the better remunerated resources, oil and gas, finance, and IT industries.

So, it is not only the shortage of relevant skills that needs to be addressed but also the pattern of deployment of such skills.

The private sector has to “balance” short and long term goals. As Prof Alf Rappaport put it “Long term goals are always driven out by short term goals”. Put another way, a business has to survive today before it can have tomorrow.

Given this, we need a Strategic Development Authority which is well supported and funded by businesses. The authority shall be governed by a board which represents the government, businesses, and educationists. The authority shall guide the development of strategic industries and be responsible for the development of human capital to meet these goals.

Australia is a developed nation and she must produce goods and services to match her higher costs of production. Singapore started as a low cost manufacturing nation but over time, it has changed its product from canned food to high value added IT products and health services.

Above all, this development strategy requires bi-partisan support.

There is nothing wrong with outsourcing infrastructure works to the most efficiency service provider. In fact, if we want to maintain our high living standards, we have to outsource. However, we must develop and maintain the ability to assess the efficiency and quality of these potential service providers. This requires an elite workforce in infrastructure systems. To achieve this, we need to radically change our approach in tertiary education programmes.