

# Borneo Bulletin

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## Foresight important for future growth of country

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THE Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies (CSPS) recently held a forum titled 'Applying Strategic Foresight and Horizon Scanning for Policy Making in Brunei'.

CSPS' special guest speaker Professor Sohail Inayatullah, the inaugural UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies, gave a talk titled 'Global Waves of Change: Drown, Ride or Become the Wave Maker' where he spoke at length about 'getting ahead of time', and what could be done in solving tomorrow's problems today.

Professor Inayatullah emphasised the need for having clarity of the future that we want to be in, and what can we do today to realise that. This means working smarter now to enhance our capacity to create the future we wish for. He added that strategic foresight helps citizens, business managers and policy makers make better-informed decisions about the futures that they want.

He spoke about current waves of change, such as the re-pricing of nature, ordinary citizens becoming producers via 3D-printing in the future, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and peer-to-peer cooperatives, amongst other global trends. He also spoke about the end of the traditional jobs and the implications of such a shift.

He highlighted that 8.1 million people are now employed in renewable energy, more than in oil and gas, and that more money

is invested worldwide into expanding renewable energy production than in fossil fuel energy generating systems.

In the area of robotisation, also, there is already a first artificially intelligent lawyer being hired by a law firm and a movie script written by AI. Professor Inayatullah quoted the words of a professor of computer science who said, “If you are afraid that you might be replaced by a computer, then you probably can and should be.”

He ended his presentation stating that contrary to the saying, ‘the grass is greener on the other side’, the reality is, ‘the grass is greener where you water it’.



Photo shows the speakers with senior officials from the Brunei Government. – CSPA

The second presentation on ‘Brunei’s Future Development Options’ was delivered by Dr Ivana Milojevic, Senior Researcher at CSPA, who presented four alternative scenarios for Brunei based on four

generic alternatives futures method, demonstrating how scenarios can help overall vision of the preferred future come along.

The four scenarios for Brunei's future development are continued growth, collapse, reversion to the past and transformation. In the Continued Growth scenario there is 'Oil Now', and 'Oil Tomorrow'. Whilst clouds may be gathering over Brunei's main economic strength, perhaps "the rain is to come and go".

However, if Brunei fails to diversify or due to some other catastrophic events, the Collapse scenario may occur. While this undesirable scenario is unlikely, it should still be taken into consideration, if only to create strategies and policies to help avoid it. The third scenario focusses on inspiration from the past and on creating a disciplined and sustainable society, where people are not indulging beyond their basic needs.

The last scenario, however, is the one of "transformed hi-tech future, for which the seeds are already there". Breakthrough technologies such as 3D-manufacturing, new bio and medical technologies and AI facilitate both economic and social transformation.

The preferred future takes into account key elements of all four scenarios: diversified economy, inclusive and diverse community, social and economic security and protected environment.

In the third presentation titled 'Brunei's Trends and Emerging Issues as Warning Signals for Addressing the Future' by Dr Diana Cheong, CSPS Chief Researcher, it was highlighted that the centre has been conducting focussed research incorporating horizon scanning to identify significant trends and emerging issues which may impact Brunei's future.

A total of 52 issues were identified, including diversification challenges, the future concept of work, a jobless future and social security options and youth disengagement.

Dr Cheong emphasised that the use of horizon scanning and strategic foresight improves traditional strategic planning exercises by allowing the strategic evaluation of future options, reducing 'surprises' and thereby allowing our plans to be 'future-proofed' and relevant to a landscape of rapid and unexpected social change. A set of future deck cards for Brunei was introduced as an interactive exercise to discuss emerging issues with the participants.

The audience provided very encouraging feedback at the end of the forum. One participant from the government sector "like the notion of flexible working hours with productivity and having meetings only when necessary". Another commented "it was very interesting to see that the presentations touched both the theory and practical approaches".