RAZAK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
A Part of National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN)

# RSOG FUTURE FOCUS SERIES: REFLECTIONS

## Malaysia's Strategic Position in a Turbulent Global Economy

In an era defined by geopolitical uncertainty, economic volatility, technological disruption, and intensifying competition for critical resources, resilience has become a strategic necessity rather than a policy aspiration. For Malaysia, the challenge is no longer simply how to respond to external shocks, but how to anticipate change, adapt proactively, and position itself to thrive in an increasingly complex global environment.

Against this backdrop, the Razak School of Government (RSOG) brought together policymakers, practitioners, and thought leaders through its Future Focus Series: Malaysia's Strategic Position in a Turbulent Global Economy on 4 May 2026 to explore the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

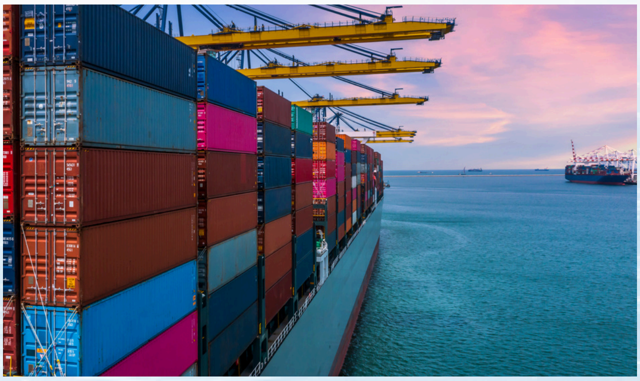
The discussion was moderated by **YBrs. Dr. Wafi Nazrin bin Dr. Abdul Hamid**, Chief Executive Officer of RSOG, and brought together a panel of distinguished experts: **YBhg. Datuk Dr. Suhana binti Md. Saleh**, Director of the Macroeconomics Division at the Ministry of Economy; **YBhg. Tan Sri Tony Fernandes**, Chief Executive Officer of Capital A Berhad; **YBrs. Dr. Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid**, Chief Economist of Bank Muamalat Malaysia Berhad; and **YBrs. Encik Danial Rahman**, Chief Executive Officer of the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI). Drawing on perspectives from government, industry, and academia, the panellists explored the challenges and opportunities facing Malaysia amid an increasingly turbulent global economy.

The session centred on the far-reaching implications of geopolitical conflicts, economic volatility, supply chain disruptions, energy security, and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for Malaysia's future development. They underscored the need for stronger public-private collaboration, forward-looking policies, and sustainable economic reforms to enhance national resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

### Crisis as a Catalyst for Transformation

A recurring theme throughout the conversation was the importance of viewing crises not merely as challenges to be managed, but as opportunities to drive innovation, accelerate reform, and rethink strategic priorities. The panellists emphasised that organisations and nations that embrace agility, adaptability, and forward-looking strategies are often better positioned to navigate uncertainty and emerge stronger from periods of disruption.

A key takeaway was that resilience is no longer defined solely by the ability to respond to crises, but increasingly by the ability to anticipate change and adapt to evolving geopolitical, economic, and technological realities.



### Human Capital Remains Malaysia's Greatest Asset

As Malaysia positions itself as a regional hub for investment, innovation, and digital industries, human capital remains the most important enabler of Malaysia's future competitiveness, innovation capacity, and economic transformation.

Panellists emphasised that sustained investment in education, leadership development, digital capabilities, and innovation is essential to build a future-ready workforce and strengthen long-term competitiveness. They also highlighted the importance of enhancing productivity, moving up the value chain, and leveraging Malaysia's strategic connectivity and diverse economy to unlock the full potential of its talent and support sustainable growth.

### Governance and Resilience Must Go Hand in Hand

The exchange of perspectives highlighted the growing importance of governance and resilience in navigating future uncertainties. Panellists emphasised the need to promote equitable opportunities, accelerate the growth of the digital economy, and strengthen the resilience of Malaysia's financial system. Together, these efforts were identified as key enablers of sustainable economic growth and national competitiveness in an increasingly complex and uncertain global landscape.

As future crises become increasingly interconnected, strengthening energy security, securing access to critical resources, and enhancing domestic supply chain resilience will be essential to safeguarding long-term economic stability and national competitiveness.

### Strengthening Public-Private Collaboration

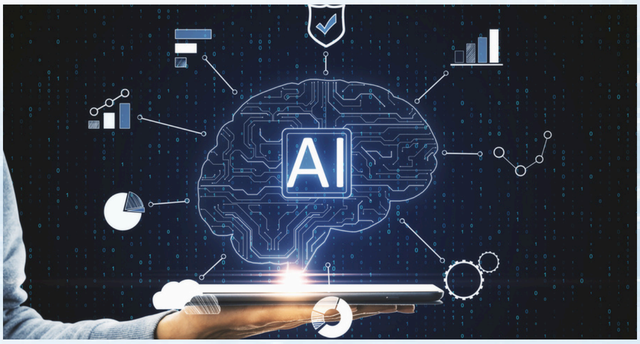
Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) featured prominently in the discussion as strategic mechanisms to accelerate development, leverage private sector expertise, and sustain economic growth during periods of fiscal constraint. According to the panellists, robust governance, accountability, and balanced risk-sharing form the foundation of effective PPPs.

The discussion also highlighted the value of greater collaboration and talent mobility between the public and private sectors, which can strengthen mutual understanding, improve policy implementation, and foster more innovative solutions to national challenges.

### Innovation and Artificial Intelligence as Growth Enablers

The session also explored the transformative potential of innovation and artificial intelligence (AI) as key drivers of future economic growth. Panellists noted that AI, digitalisation, and the commercialisation of research and technology can enhance productivity, improve decision-making, and unlock new opportunities for economic transformation. To remain competitive in an increasingly technology-driven global economy, Malaysia must continue investing in innovation ecosystems, digital talent, emerging technologies, and stronger pathways for research commercialisation.

While recognising Malaysia's growing research capabilities, the panel also stressed the importance of strengthening the link between research and commercialisation. Translating research outcomes into market-ready solutions, high-value industries, and innovative products will be critical to driving innovation-led growth and enhancing economic competitiveness.



## Pragmatism in an Increasingly Uncertain World

Another highlight was the importance of pragmatic policymaking in navigating an increasingly complex global environment. Policymakers must adopt realistic, practical, and forward-looking approaches that balance resilience with long-term growth objectives while remaining agile in responding to emerging risks and opportunities.

The discussion also reinforced the importance of adaptive leadership in navigating uncertainty, balancing short-term pressures with long-term national priorities, and driving meaningful transformation.

## Malaysia's Strategic Position in a Changing Global Order

Beyond domestic reforms and economic resilience, panellists recognised Malaysia's unique role within an evolving global landscape. Situated at the heart of Southeast Asia and connected to major regional and international trade routes, Malaysia stands to benefit from shifting investment patterns, supply chain diversification, and deeper regional integration.

As ASEAN's influence in global trade and investment continues to grow, Malaysia is well placed to leverage greater cross-border economic cooperation and regional connectivity. Panellists noted that the country's diverse economy, established industrial base, strong regional linkages, and expanding digital capabilities provide a solid foundation for future growth.

However, realising these opportunities will require continued investment in human capital, innovation, infrastructure, and institutional effectiveness. By strengthening these fundamentals, Malaysia can further enhance its role as a trusted regional hub for trade, investment, technology, and talent development.

## Looking Ahead

The Future Focus Series reaffirmed that Malaysia possesses many of the foundations needed for long-term success, including its strategic location, strong regional connectivity, institutional stability, and talented workforce. Realising these advantages, however, will require effective governance, sustained investment in people, stronger cross-sector collaboration, and the ability to adapt to an increasingly complex global environment.

As geopolitical, economic, and technological shifts continue to reshape the global landscape, panellists emphasised the importance of strengthening energy and food security, developing future-ready talent, enhancing resilience, and fostering institutional agility. They also highlighted the need to deepen regional cooperation and capture emerging opportunities in technology, manufacturing, and services.

The overarching message was clear: uncertainty is no longer an occasional disruption, but a defining feature of today's world. Malaysia's future success will depend on its ability to anticipate change, embrace innovation, strengthen institutions, and invest in its people. By remaining adaptable, collaborative, and forward-looking, the country can turn challenges into opportunities and emerge as a more resilient, competitive, and future-ready nation.

### Key Takeaways

- **Human capital remains Malaysia's most valuable strategic advantage**, highlighting the need for sustained investment in education, leadership development, digital skills, and innovation.
- **Effective governance and resilient institutions** are fundamental to maintaining sustainable growth, strengthening competitiveness, and navigating an increasingly complex global landscape.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)** have the potential to accelerate national development, harness private sector expertise, and drive economic progress when supported by strong governance and appropriate risk-sharing mechanisms.
- **Artificial intelligence, digitalisation, and innovation** will play an increasingly important role in enhancing productivity, improving decision-making, and supporting Malaysia's economic transformation.
- **Strengthening energy security, food security, and supply chain resilience** is critical to safeguarding Malaysia's long-term stability and preparedness against future disruptions.
- **Agile leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and a future-oriented mindset** will be key to enabling Malaysia to navigate uncertainty, seize emerging opportunities, and achieve sustainable long-term prosperity.

## FEATURED SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR

**YBhg. Datuk Dr. Suhana binti Md. Saleh**
**Director, Macroeconomics Division, Ministry of Economy**

A seasoned economist with over 30 years of experience in national economic planning and policy formulation. Datuk Dr. Suhana has played a key role in advancing Malaysia's macroeconomic, digitalisation, and sustainable development agenda, including contributions to the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (RMK13).

**YBhg. Tan Sri Tony Fernandes**
**Chief Executive Officer, Capital A Berhad**

One of Asia's most recognised entrepreneurs, Tan Sri Tony transformed AirAsia into a leading low-cost airline, making air travel more accessible across the region. His career spans aviation, media, and business leadership, earning him numerous international recognitions.

**YBrs. Dr. Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid**
**Chief Economist, Bank Muamalat Malaysia Berhad**

An economist with extensive experience in the financial and capital markets sector, Dr. Afzanizam provides strategic insights on fiscal and monetary policy. He is also a respected commentator, academic advisor, and contributor to national economic discussions.

**YBrs. Encik Danial Rahman**
**Chief Executive Officer, Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI)**

A policy and thought leadership practitioner whose experience spans law, government, education, and technology. Formerly serving several Malaysian ministries, he continues to contribute to public discourse through policy research, media engagement, and leadership development initiatives.

**Moderator:**

**YBrs. Dr. Wafi Nazrin bin Dr. Abdul Hamid**
**Chief Executive Officer, Razak School of Government (RSOG)**

A distinguished corporate counsel and governance leader with more than three decades of experience across major Malaysian organisations. Dr. Wafi combines extensive corporate, academic, and public sector expertise in advancing leadership, governance, and talent development.