

merdekafocus

THE EDGE
SPECIAL FOCUS
SEPTEMBER 1,
2014



SEEDING THE FUTURE

IN COLLABORATION WITH

TalentCorp
MALAYSIA



CONTENTS

4

BOLD INITIATIVES

8

VIEWES FROM THE TOP

11

THE NEXT GENERATION

14

THE INTELLIGENTSIA

EDITORIAL

SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR | AZAM ARIS
 PROJECT EDITOR | ANNA TAING
 WRITERS | JENNIFER JACOBS, THO LIM MING, EMILY CHOW, SARAH VOON, NURUL IMAN DIMYATI, CHESTER TAY
 EXECUTIVE EDITOR (PRODUCTION) | OOI INN LEONG
 CHIEF COPY EDITOR | PUSHPAM SINNAKAUNDAN, MAH PIN PIN
 SENIOR COPY EDITORS | KENNETH FRANCIS MARTINUS, WONG SOON FAH
 COPY EDITOR | LEE MEI GEOK
 ART DIRECTOR | SHARON KHOH
 DESIGN TEAM | JOANNE SOO

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER | SHARON TEH
 (012) 313 9056
 SENIOR SALES MANAGERS | GEETHA PERUMAL
 (016) 250 8640
 FONG LAI KUAN
 (012) 386 2831
 ACTING SENIOR SALES MANAGER | GREGORY THU
 (012) 376 0614
 ACCOUNT MANAGERS | LUM WAI FONG
 (016) 218 5908
 JOANE TAN
 (012) 3772885
 NG CHING YIN
 (012) 232 8035
 SHAFINA SYAHRIR
 (017) 281 4787
 SHANNON LEONG
 (012) 677 5345
 DIGITAL MEDIA | SHARON LEE
 (016) 330 1571
 AD TRAFFIC MANAGER | VIGNESWARY KRISHNAN
 (603) 7721 8005
 EMAIL | mkt.ad@bizedge.com

CORPORATE

PUBLISHER & GROUP CEO | HO KAY TAT
 MANAGING DIRECTOR | AU FOONG YEE
 DEPUTY MANAGING DIRECTOR | LIM SHIEW YUIN

WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS, LETTERS AND CRITICISM.
 PHONE (03) 7721 8000
 E-MAIL editor@bizedge.com

PSEUDONYMS ARE ALLOWED BUT PLEASE STATE YOUR FULL NAME, ADDRESS AND CONTACT NUMBER (TEL/FAX) FOR US TO VERIFY.



KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE

It is the best of times, it is the worst of times. Take your pick. If you want to see real change and play a part in making it happen, it is the best of times. However, if you are focused only on the obstacles that this country has seen over the past year, you may be tempted to call it the worst of times.

Johan Mahmood Merican, CEO of Talent Corp Malaysia Bhd, belongs to the first category. "I meet a lot of Malaysians who have despaired over the future of our country. It doesn't help when extreme minority views dominate public discourse and we seem unable to unite on issues critical to the country, like education.

"It has been said 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men (and women) do nothing'. Hence, I believe that if there's enough of us, each doing our bit to change for the better, then our country can succeed. We need as many of us [as possible], keeping that faith and dream alive, so that we can still contribute and make Malaysia as great as it deserves to be."

Hence, that is the essence of this special pullout on Merdeka, done in collaboration with TalentCorp. Do we have what it takes to keep the dream alive, to borrow a phrase from Johan?

In the last 57 years, Malaysia has gone through many ups and downs, economically and politically. But the mere fact that we have come so far as a nation testifies to the spirit and resilience of the people.

As you turn the following pages, you will find that the common thread that weaves the stories together is the recognition that this country is going through some tough times. Yet, all are willing to put their shoulder to the wheel and fight for a better tomorrow, so that Malaysia is a country of choice for talent and investment.

Yes, Malaysia has come a long way since 1957. The challenge is ensuring that the country remains a good place to be for future generations. Clearly, a country is only as good as its people. We need to draw on our resources within the country and outside it, so that we can have a sustainable pipeline of talent to drive the economy forward.

Rather than curse the darkness, let's all light a candle to illuminate a better path forward. All it takes is a spark to get the fire going.

Merdeka!

E

9 Technologies to Elevate Cyberjaya into a Global Technology Hub

Since its inception in 1997 as a nucleus for the development of an ICT-based industry in Malaysia, Cyberjaya has continuously evolved over the years to serve the needs of ICT players, entrepreneurs and the larger economy – both locally and in the region. Regarded as a premier ICT hub today, the next phase of development is to move beyond a regional platform and onto a global scale.

Spearheading this initiative is Cyberview Sdn Bhd, the entity that has been given the mandate by the Malaysian government to transform Cyberjaya into a global technology hub. More than just mere semantics, the management team at Cyberview believes the foundation and building blocks to become a global technology hub is already in place.

“It is not necessarily a quantum leap from where Cyberjaya is today, but the focus to transform the city into a global technology hub is definitely a significant step forward for the country,” says Faris Yahaya, managing director of Cyberview Sdn Bhd.

“We recognize that Cyberjaya is beyond just ICT, and that is why we need to explore how to leverage its existing resources and facilities to support other companies and industries that are actively involved in emerging technologies,” adds Faris noting that this does not in any way mean that Cyberjaya will disregard future developments in the ICT sector.

For Cyberview, the shift in focus from a premier ICT hub to a global technology hub is a decision that has to be made with careful consideration and analysis. To ensure that it is on the right path, Cyberview commissioned a study on the risks and benefits of such a transformation process which includes consultation and engagement with stakeholders for input. Based on results from the study, Cyberview was able to formulate a strategic blueprint for the global technology hub.

According to Faris, the formulation of the blueprint took into account relevant government policies that touched on technological priorities for the country. The blueprint was also developed based on an evaluation of leading science and technology parks around the world. It was benchmarked against these science and technology parks in order to identify and adopt the best practices and key success factors to become a global technology hub.

Nine technology areas were identified for Cyberjaya to focus on as a global technology hub. The entire process involved studying the 11 National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) from the Economic Transformation Program (ETP), and then expanding the value chain of each industry. From there a universe of relevant new technologies that apply to each industry were generated and based on this method, a database containing 159 technologies were identified. To further narrow down from 159 technologies to just nine technology areas, multiple criteria were applied to assess and determine the most feasible and viable technology areas that Cyberjaya should focus on.

The criteria includes reviewing the technology's relevance and potential in relation to Cyberjaya, determining how each technology would fit strategically by considering the existing resources that are available within the country and region, measuring the value proposition of each technology area to ensure that it enhances Cyberjaya's position as a global technology hub, among others.

Based on the study, it was concluded, Cyberjaya would need to focus on the following nine key technology areas – green technology, biotechnology, smart grid technology, wearable technology, information security, creative content, mobile in-



“Technology evolves fast, so when we concluded the study, 9 rapid technology growth focus was identified to bring this plan up to speed until the year 2020” – Faris



ternet, cloud computing and big data analytics.

Faris believes that it is reasonable to concentrate all efforts on these nine technology areas for the next five to six years. “Technology evolves fast, so when we concluded the study, nine rapid technology growth focuses were identified to bring this plan up to speed until the year 2020,” he says.

In line with the new plan, Cyberview has identified 90 companies that it will be targeting – essentially 10 for each technology area. “The main objective is to bring Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Domestic Direct Investments (DDI) to drive investments into the city. There is a need to grow the local industry, accelerate the start-up ecosystem and complete the soft infrastructure. We'll work very closely with existing government agencies including Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC), Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) and InvestKL,” says Faris.

Additionally, Cyberview will participate at global networking events to give Cyberjaya the right exposure it needs. “It is a matter of profiling it to get that global exposure. We have to meet the right people on top of exposing ourselves to emerging technology areas,” Faris explains. “It is more than just a pitch. It is making sure they are aware of the existence of Cyberjaya and what it has to offer.”

Thankfully, Cyberjaya is already a strong brand name that Cyberview can market to the rest of the world. Faris is confi-

dent that there is still a lot of untapped potential, and when benchmarked against the six leading science and technological parks around the world, there were some strengths that stood out, he says.

“Unlike other technology parks, Cyberjaya is an entire city. We have a population of 70,000 that is continuously growing and targeting a population of 100,000 by the end of 2016. This gives Cyberjaya the critical mass to sustain growth,” Faris points out. “Also, to date 40,000 technology-related jobs have been created by the 800 companies based in Cyberjaya. If you look even closer, out of the 800 companies, about 500 are MSC Malaysia status companies.”

Faris also contends that it has an advantage in terms of geographical location. Apart from various highways that connect Cyberjaya to other towns and cities, this emerging global technology hub also offers a natural gateway to the 600 million populations within Southeast Asia.

Faris hopes that both local and foreign investors will see the value that Cyberjaya has to offer as a global technology hub. At the end of the day, the biggest beneficiaries are Malaysians, he opines.

“Given the government's pursuit to elevate Malaysia to become a high income nation, Cyberview certainly has a role to play in this national economic transformation. Through Cyberjaya, we're doing our part to make sure our country succeeds,” Faris says.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY





bold initiatives

Attracting and retaining talent is a challenge for many companies, but some organisations have already implemented strategies that will appeal to and help develop the next generation of leaders. Here is a look at what they are doing to keep the talent pipeline filled.

Diversity and inclusiveness disclosure no longer optional

Malaysia has taken a bold step forward in its agenda to promote diversity and inclusion in the workforce. The latest initiative is a five-step strategy announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak where he called on the private sector to show leadership in talent practices for Malaysia.

Corporate leaders have been asked to emulate the best international practices in diversity and inclusion by disclosing the breakdown of their workforce in terms of gender, ethnicity and age by management levels in their company's annual reports. To this effect, all listed companies are required to disclose their diversity policy for board, management and workforce in annual reports issued after Jan 1, 2015.

In view of Malaysia's chairmanship of Asean next year, five-year multiple-entry visas are allowed from December onwards to support the movement of business visitors, investors and fund managers, including those from beyond Asean, such as India and China.

To tap Asean's potential, a key pillar of Malaysia's 2015 chairmanship is the promotion of a people-centred Asean, which involves, among other things, the launch of the MY Asean Internship programme aimed at engaging the youth in opportunities that arise out of the Asean Economic Community.

Malaysian companies with a regional presence, such as Malayan Banking Bhd, CIMB Group Holdings Bhd, DiGi.Com Bhd, Axiata Group Bhd, Nestle (Malaysia) Bhd, Sunway Group and Sime Darby Bhd, have agreed to pioneer this programme.



Doing it the TIGER way

BY NURUL IMAN DIMYATI

Malayan Banking Bhd, or Maybank as it is commonly known, has gone through many ups and downs since it was established in 1960. But not only has it managed to stay in the game, it has also spread its wings to become the fourth largest bank in Southeast Asia by assets.

Maybank currently operates an extensive network of more than 2,000 offices in about 20 countries. The group has some 47,000 employees to cater to their growing number of customers, half of whom work right here in Malaysia.

Aspiring to be a bank that serves the community, by listening to its customers and facilitating growth and value, means Maybank has to work hard to build a "good family" out of its workforce.

How is this done? The group's chief human capital officer Nora Abd Manaf says the secret lies in Maybank's core values — teamwork, integrity, growth, excellence and efficiency and relationship building. In short, they live and work by their TIGER values.

"A Maybanker is a person who firstly must have the skills to perform his or her job. After all, we are a profit-making entity. Secondly, the job is performed with both the mind and heart because humanising has to come from the heart," Nora says.

"It is someone who is very aware of others as much as he or she is self-aware. It is someone who goes out of his or her way to listen because a lot of people hear but don't listen. Not only listening and putting others' needs above his or her own, but also someone who gives others the opportunity to ensure he or she is taken care of as well. It is always give and take."

Over the last three years, the banking group has seen an improvement in its retention rate for high-potential and high-performing employees. Where once it was six out of 10 who left, now it is only two out of 10.

A contributing factor is the bank's monitoring and tracking of talents in all aspects. Nora calls it the talent dashboard. "It is the ability to track and know where you are in all aspects. It is almost a religion for us. We track to ensure that we have a place for everyone," she says.

The group has a place for almost everyone, from those below the age of 30 to those above 55, and across the whole spectrum of race and ethnicity.

Maybank makes diversity and inclusion its policy to ensure that its workforce reflects the racial mix of every country in which it operates. This is tracked and reported every month to the executive committee, and it goes up to the board as well.

"We have pools feeding into every level of the organisation. We use the pool not only to ensure a sustainable pipeline, but also to ensure diversity and inclusion are monitored," Nora says. It is about giving confidence and reassurance to everyone, whether they are young or old.

The group sends its employees on different types of international assignments. "Do we lose people [during these assignments]? No, because we track this. We lost people in the past because we didn't track their progress," Nora says.

To ensure career progression, Maybank introduced programmes at various levels — entry, middle, top and executive — to ensure robust career development.

An example of its entry-level programme is the Global Maybank Apprentice Programme (GMAP), which is a two-year on-the-job programme for graduates to explore and experience different functions within an area of their choice. Transitioning Leaders to CEO (TLC) is its top management programme for high-performing middle managers, providing them with a platform to strengthen their potential to take on CEO-like roles.

Aside from financial support, more than 20,000 employees have volunteered and contributed their expertise, knowledge and skills through Maybank's community programmes. This allows them to have the satisfaction of engaging with the community while empowering them further.

At the end of the day, it is not all about the money, Nora says. "We know our people are headhunted every day and they are given good increments. But this is what we say to our people, 'We want to create a workplace where you will choose to stay. We know you will choose to stay even if you have got fantastic offers out there.'" **E**

ready4work.my
education for employment

AS A REGIONAL CHAMPION, MAYBANK UNDERSTANDS THAT OPTIMISING ON MALAYSIA'S TALENT IS THE BEST WAY TO SECURE OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE. TOGETHER WITH US, THEY HAVE INVESTED IN ENGAGING AND ATTRACTING MALAYSIAN TALENT IN LOCAL UNIVERSITIES AND ABROAD.

Visit Ready4Work.my to learn more

TalentCorp
MALAYSIA



We have pools feeding into every level of the organisation. We use the pool not only to ensure a sustainable pipeline, but also to ensure diversity and inclusion are monitored.



A CHange for the better

BY JENNIFER JACOBS

When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced a double tax deduction for companies that sponsor Malaysian citizens at local universities under Budget 2012, Mok Wai Ling, a partner at Crowe Horwath, got cracking. She saw a way through which companies could earn tax deductions and, more importantly, also affect a great number of people by lifting them out of the cycle of poverty.

"We have so many contacts, and when we actually talked to them and our friends, a lot of them were interested. But they didn't want the administrative hassle of looking for their own candidates, so since Crowe Horwath was already doing it, we offered to coordinate the whole thing," she explains.

This initiative grew into Project CHange. There were a few requirements: the students would have to be Malaysians; their parents would have to earn less than RM5,000 a month combined; and they would have to attend a Malaysian institution of higher learning, either public or private.

The sponsors were willing to pay up to RM10,000 a year, which was more than enough for public universities, but not quite enough for private ones. Sometimes, they agreed to sponsor more for deserving cases.

Mok went through the applications and did the interviews herself. Most of the students who had applied were poor. One candidate could only manage one "proper" meal a day, and that too was bread thickly spread with 'kaya' because the rest of her money was spent on health supplements for her sickly mother. Sometimes she couldn't even afford this and on those days, she fasted.

"How can you not want to help people like these?" asks Mok. Even with such cases, she would be stringent in her selection process. Not only would the candidates need to qualify economically, they would need to maintain a 3.0 grade point average (GPA), be active in extracurricular activities and demonstrate a desire to give back to the community.

Some, she had to turn down. "There was actually a girl who begged me to consider her because although her father earned RM8,000 a month, he had served as a guarantor for a friend whose business had failed, so all his money was spent settling that debt and he could not support her. But how can I go to my client and say, 'Oh, help this one, but you won't be getting a deduction for it?'"

Nevertheless, some of her clients were willing to overlook the tax deduction and help in their personal capacity out of the kindness of their hearts. The sponsors have to sign an MoU to commit to supporting the candidate through his/her university studies. Similarly, the candidates have to sign an MoU committing to, among others things, keep up their GPA and conduct themselves in a manner befitting a scholar.

"They give us a report twice a year on how they are doing academically and socially. What I mean by socially is, what they do in their spare time. The majority of them are involved in some kind of social or voluntary activity," says Mok.

Paying it forward is part of the plan. "When they are in a position to help, just like they are being helped now, they will. They are already helping out in their spare time, but once they graduate, get a job and become successful, I cannot guarantee that they will not be so busy with their work and making money that they will forget everything.

"I can only trust them. And I look forward to the time when they will be able to carry on the good work that has been started with them," she says.

Mok is proud of the scholars, proud of the people they are and what they are setting out to achieve. "The majority of them want to do something with their lives. They want to go back and help their communities. They have seen how poverty has held their parents down and they want to be able to break out of that cycle."

All the scholars are close to their parents. "Their parents teach them that even if they are poor, they must live their lives with integrity, honesty and kindness, and that they must be considerate. Also, if they are successful in the future, they must reach out and help others as they are being helped now," she says.

Mok feels that because of young people such as these, there is hope for the country. "Even if just one or two of them go on to make a difference, that will be great. It will mean that we have invested correctly."

One of the scholars, who has since graduated, studied public policy. He studied in Kuala Lumpur and used to go home on the weekends to help his father look after his 105-year-old grandfather. And while he was home, he would hold classes for primary school students to instruct them in subjects like Maths and English. And because most of the people in his kampung were poor and he was one of the very few to go to university, the other villagers would ask for his help in filling in government forms, to apply for grants, says Mok.

There is a scholar whose parents would wake up at 3am to buy fish from wholesalers before selling them in the market. The father had a bad back from standing the whole day and the mother's hand broke

out in rashes from constant contact with the fish. The scholar is studying medicine.

Mok's favourite, perhaps, is an architectural student who graduated from Universiti Malaya this year. "His father is a wood craftsman in either Kelantan or Terengganu, earning RM700 a month to support a family of five or six children. It was his father who inspired him to be an architect."

She points out that while public university fees are cheap because the government subsidises 80% to 90% of them, students still need to pay for accommodation, food and study materials. Those who are studying architecture are required to build models, and each model can easily cost RM200. "When your father is earning RM700 a month, there is no way he can support you, so he came to us and I got one of my clients to sponsor him."

Project CHange does not tell the candidates what courses to take or what to do with it. The money is a grant rather than a loan and students are not bound to work for the companies that provide them the funds. "So we have the whole range of courses — biochemistry, food technology, medicine, architecture, multimedia, film production, and even aeronautical engineering," says Mok.

Sometimes students fall below their required GPA, putting them in danger of losing their scholarship. Mok assesses this on a case by case basis. "One of my scholars only managed to achieve a GPA of 2.33, but I defended her to her sponsor. She had gone to Universiti Malaya Sabah and fallen ill, so she was in and out of the hospital and missing classes. She took photos of her medical bills and medication to prove that she wasn't fooling around.

"Her sponsor decided to give her a chance and in one semester, she managed to bring her GPA up to 2.97, which is tremendous. It shows that these people are serious and when they have been given an opportunity, they will do their best."

While Mok thinks it is wonderful that the government has offered a double tax deduction to help poor students fund their university education, she does not think it goes far enough. What about those who are not academically inclined, who fail their examinations and fall through the cracks?

"The school system is churning out 50,000 to 80,000 of these annually and they come out with no hope. Why can't the government extend a similar incentive for vocational schools? We have to rethink the way we view vocational training. In the West, skilled labourers are the backbone of communities."

Mok is an optimist, but she doesn't see the world through rose-coloured glasses. She acknowledges that there are problems, but she is certain that they can be fixed. "If you don't start now, who is going to do it? This is our country. We have to fight for it because if we don't, no one else will. The thing is to keep trying. The thing is not to give up." **E**

SUHAIMI YUSUF / THE EDGE, SAM FONG / THE EDGE, PATRICK GOH / THE EDGE



If you don't start now, who is going to do it? This is our country. We have to fight for it because if we don't, no one else will. The thing is to keep trying. The thing is not to give up.



SIP

STRUCTURED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

EMPLOYERS PROVIDING MALAYSIAN STUDENTS FROM LOCAL UNIVERSITIES WITH INDUSTRY EXPOSURE THROUGH A STRUCTURED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME ARE ACCORDED TAX INCENTIVES.

Visit talentcorp.com.my to learn more

TalentCorp
MALAYSIA

Creating a great place to work

BY CHESTER TAY

Our future depends on how well many different kinds of people can live and work together." This was the statement made by the first prime minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, during his 80th birthday celebration on Feb 8, 1983.

The late Tunku placed great emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion in Malaysia's economic development and progress. Indeed, as far back as the early days when Malaysia embarked on its economic development drive, its diversity was one of the compelling reasons foreign investors chose this country as a destination for their manufacturing activities.

Today, many multinational corporations in the country continue to stress and put in place initiatives that promote inclusion and diversity within the workplace, not just in terms of race and gender but also from other perspectives, such as age and background.

One such company is US-based Intel, which began operations in Penang as far back as 1972. In fact, it takes this so seriously that a special post was created to ensure that diversity and inclusion were indeed part of the company's ethos.

Intel Malaysia's diversity and inclusion manager Cheah Li Wei says the objective is to create a "great place to work". "We provide equal-employment opportunities for all applicants and employees. We do not discriminate; we make sure women, minorities, people with disabilities, people in the military and veterans, and other diverse groups are appropriately represented."

In fact, if there are concerns about discrimination, Intel's Open Door practices allow employees to speak up and expect a timely response, she stresses. The rationale is simple. "Intel believes that by building a great place to work, employees will bring performance, and that leads to huge business value for the company," she elaborates. "At Intel, we respect, value and celebrate the unique points of view and opportunities that come with our diverse employee population."

According to Cheah, Intel Malaysia currently has a workforce that is made up almost equally of men and women, and encompasses all major ethnic groups in the country. Some 75% have worked in the company for more than five years.

This level of diversity is a result of the various measures that have been put in place. For example, to ensure that it achieves its hiring goal of having a balanced workforce, the company's interviewing

panel itself is composed of a diverse group of people.

Meanwhile, Intel's Learning and Development courses provide its employees with knowledge and skills in a wide variety of topics, including leadership, project management, problem-solving, effective decision-making, cross-cultural training and technical subjects.

The company also inculcates a culture in which employees are encouraged to communicate with their managers, senior leaders and peers through its Internet forum, mentoring and coaching relationships, and social media channels.

To ensure talent sustainability, Intel Malaysia works closely with secondary schools, universities and government agencies to develop a strong talent pipeline. "We currently work with TalentCorp on a STAR programme, in which we bring in JPA scholars to our company to experience our work environment," says Cheah.

It also works with Collaborative Research in Engineering, Science and Technology (Crest) to increase the take-up rate of science, technology, engineering and maths courses in secondary schools.

Today, Intel Malaysia has more than 8,000 employees involved in assembly and test manufacturing, microprocessor design and development, global shared services in finance, IT and human resources.

This high level of diversity and inclusion has worked in the company's favour. Cheah tells this story of how gender diversity helped improve productivity. "An all-male module engineering team was in fire-fighting mode and struggling to meet its weekly commitment. So, the manager decided to bring in a female engineer to change the dynamics of the group, and this led to a well-coordinated team that eventually improved its output."

Cheah: By building a great place to work, employees will bring performance, and that leads to huge business value for the company

Rewarding diversity

BY EMILY CHOW

In the area of talent sustainability, Malaysia has a twofold problem — it is experiencing a brain drain, while a part of its workforce lacks critical thinking skills. "Based on discussions with employers, we find that the most common problem, insofar as finance talent is concerned, is people who lack critical thinking and analytical skills, as well as a general inability to strategise and provide sound business counsel," says Jennifer Lopez, head of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) Malaysia.

But in the global arena, Malaysian professionals are highly sought after, she points out. "On the one hand, this is a good problem to have because our talents are acknowledged to be of international standard. Living in a multi-cultural landscape makes our people adept at working with others from various backgrounds and experience.

"However, this makes it necessary for policymakers, companies and educational institutions to work together to ensure the talent pipeline is continuously fed, so that we have adequate quality talent to support our growing economy. This should include mechanisms that secure the inflow of talent into the country, and this is where TalentCorp plays a key role."

In view of this problem, companies should employ wholesome strategies when developing talent management policies. According to Lopez, this means companies shouldn't focus just on attracting talent, but also on retaining them.

"This could include conducting periodic 'happiness index' surveys, providing training that adds to their personal and professional development, and organising activities out-

side the work scope to enrich their lives," she says, emphasising that diversity and inclusion should be the backbone of all talent management policies.

"Ultimately, it's about getting the most out of your business and taking advantage of creative tension, making sure you don't miss out on the talent you have."

In helping companies attract and sustain talent, ACCA Malaysia has collaborated with selected partners on strategic initiatives aimed at grooming people. One such programme, in partnership with TalentCorp, is Certify Me Now!, a government-funded, upskilling initiative for local fresh graduates to study the ACCA qualification and become professionally certified.

Other programmes, carried out with various employers and which targets undergraduates, include the Deloitte Tax Challenge, the ACCA-PwC STAR Programme, the BEST Leadership Development with KPMG and TAR University College, and the ACCA-Shell Club, which supports ACCA students and members at Shell in their personal and professional development.

"We constantly keep our options open to new ideas on talent development programmes for the accounting profession," Lopez says.

The association has hosted the ACCA Malaysia Sustainability Reporting Awards (MaSRA) since 2002. The awards recognise organisations that document and report on their sustainability, environmental and social initiatives.

"Throughout the 11 cycles of these awards, we have noted an increasing awareness and acceptance among Malaysian companies to be more transparent in their reporting and for them to communicate their sustainability practices and performance. This means incorporating the three Ps — Profit, People and Planet — into the company's blueprint," says Lopez.

"It has been very encouraging to see how the overall quality of sustainability reports produced by companies in Malaysia improve year on year."

This year, the theme of the awards is "Sustainability & Inclusiveness", in line with ACCA Malaysia's belief that sustainable practices should be integrated into each component of an organisation's value chain and strategies, hence creating value for the organisation, people and the environment.

"This includes sustainable workplace practices and policies such as diversity of talent, optimum usage of resources, minimising carbon footprint, contributions to employees and social welfare as well as conserving the environment," Lopez says.

"Today, Malaysia is regarded as a leader and champion of sustainability reporting in Asia. Studies show that more local companies and local subsidiaries of multinational corporations issue sustainability reports compared with their peers in the region, so ACCA is proud to have played a role in building the business case for sustainable practices and development in Malaysia."

Lopez: We constantly keep our options open to new ideas on talent development programmes for the accounting profession





Impacting future generations one school at a time

BY SARAH VOON

A ripple effect happens when an event or action impacts something that, in turn, has an effect on something else. And it is this that the PINTAR Foundation hopes to create with its talent development initiatives.

Since 2008, the foundation has helped to link companies with underserved schools in Malaysia and coordinate school adoption programmes. In adopting these underserved schools, these companies help them to perform better, both academically and otherwise.

“Our vision is to inspire the young generation to be responsible citizens through our three key tenets — nurturing talent, advocating responsibility and promoting intelligence,” says PINTAR CEO Karimah Tan Abdullah.

“A lot of people think PINTAR simply means smart. While in Malay it does, it is also an acronym for Promoting Intelligence, Nurturing Talent and Advocating Responsibility.

“We are looking at a holistic educational experience, which is in line with the National Education Blueprint. We encourage our members to adopt primary schools because we feel that if [students] get the basics right in primary school, when they get to secondary school, they will face fewer challenges and problems.”

PINTAR currently has 376 schools and 37 members under its umbrella. More than 300 programmes are organised a year and more than 1,000 staff from the various companies volunteer for these programmes.

“Since the inception of the school adoption programme, PINTAR has touched over 660,000 students through the companies as well as our national programmes,” Karimah says.

UEM Sunrise: Encouraging the next generation to realise its full potential

UEM Sunrise Bhd is a pioneer member of PINTAR. It has adopted 17 schools, of which 13 are primary and four are secondary. Collaborating with PINTAR is part of its core corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach, which is based on two strategies — education enhancement and community engagement.

“We worked closely with PINTAR Foundation to identify the schools to be adopted, ensuring that they meet the criteria set by the Foundation,” says Nik Surina Suria Nik Abdullah, head of corporate communications at UEM Sunrise.

The company feels that it has achieved much in the seven years that it has been a member of PINTAR. “We feel that we have done something beneficial for them. This is evident from the positive and encouraging feedback we have received from stakeholders, which are the teachers, students and parents of the programme,” Nik Surina says.

There is no reason not to continue building up the next generation, seeing the success of this programme thus far. “It is UEM Sunrise’s hope to be able to adopt more schools and further enhance educational support programmes in preparing the younger generation for this new and changing environment,” she adds.

“The nation’s future lies in their hands.”

UEM Sunrise hopes that there will be more support, participation and collaboration by organisations through the PINTAR programme.

Karimah: We encourage our members to adopt primary schools because we feel that if [students] get the basics right in primary school, when they get to secondary school, they will face fewer challenges and problems



Technip: All about safety and sustainability

Technip Geoproduction (M) Sdn Bhd became a member of PINTAR in 2010 and currently has one school under its wing — SK Ulu Lumagar in Bongawan, Sabah. Before getting into the specifics of the programme, Syed Feizal Syed Mohammad, chairman and senior vice-president of Technip’s Malaysia and Brunei operations, gives a safety briefing. “We take safety very seriously here at Technip,” he says.

Another thing it takes seriously is its commitment to the school it has adopted. “We only adopted one school so we can be focused on helping that school,” Syed explains. “When we go into a CSR programme, we purely look at the value of contributing back to society.”

Although Technip did not have a site in Sabah at the point of adoption, that did not hinder it from adopting the remote school. “[This school] was recommended by PINTAR and one of our main drivers in choosing a school was its needs.”

Technip believes that meeting key criteria in terms of corporate values is also important. “Two [of our corporate] values that stand out clearly where the school is concerned is building the future and encouraging a fair return for all,” Syed says.

The first value drives the talent sustainability it hopes to achieve. “Our Sustainable Development (SD) committee evaluated the demographics of the school and its performance to see what kind of programmes we could put in place — [for] academic performance as well as soft skills,” he points out.

The results were positive. Syed says the students who went on to secondary school performed well academically, and were more outspoken and confident.

The second value — encouraging a fair return for all — is more geared towards Technip’s staff rather than the students. “With CSR, I believe what goes around comes around. It helps build the character and values of the staff. If you have employees with good moral and social values, this is where the company gets the returns — whether it is business or social benefits,” Syed opines.

He believes that there is a huge potential for talent to be unlocked through CSR programmes, such as the school adoption programme. “There are talent reservoirs to be tapped and nurtured in every part of the country. If Technip can play a small but significant role in doing this, then the thousands of companies in Malaysia can too. Then, there will be a multiplier effect and through this, we can achieve talent sustainability.”

Syed: With CSR, I believe what goes around comes around. It helps build the character and values of the staff. If you have employees with good moral and social values, this is where the company gets the returns — whether it is business or social benefits



flexWorkLife.my

TO ENCOURAGE MORE MALAYSIAN EMPLOYERS TO EMBRACE FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS, INTEL SHARES THEIR BEST PRACTICES AND SUPPORTS THE WORK OF ITS DIVERSITY ADVOCATE IN PROMOTING BETTER WORK-LIFE PRACTICES WITH OTHER EMPLOYERS.

Visit flexWorkLife.my to learn more

TalentCorp
MALAYSIA



views from the top

The world is getting increasingly competitive and the war for talent is a real issue, says Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah. That is why he and other corporate leaders such as Tan Sri Yong Poh Kon are passionate about education. In these interviews with *The Edge*, Cheah and Yong share their thoughts on talent sustainability and nation building.

A true-blue Malaysian

BY ANNA TAING

Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah, the founder of Sunway Group, is a true-blue Malaysian. "I believe in this country. My grandchildren are the fifth generation in Malaysia. While I have amassed some money from my business, I will continue to give and contribute to the welfare and progress of the nation," he says.

It is not just rhetoric. While Cheah has continued to reinvest his money and expand his company, his children are very much involved in the conglomerate that he has built up over the last 40 years. "I believe my children will contribute their fair share of good work to take the business to greater heights and give back to society," he says.

This explains why Cheah is big on sustainability, which he describes as building a culture that can be passed from one generation to another. "I have always asked this question: What we are doing, is it sustainable over time?"

In fact, when he started developing Bandar Sunway, it was just a huge tin-mining wasteland, which he describes as a "moonscape". It was a challenging task as it involved brownfield redevelopment, Cheah recalls. "You can find earthworms here today; the whole eco-system has been restored," he says.

He is also very passionate about education. Indeed, the topic gets him animated and all fired up. "It is the key life-transforming enabler," he stresses.

"I come from a small village in Perak called Pusing. I saw the effects of poverty and the deprivation of opportunities to study, and the need to improve the well-being and prospects of the people. Because of this, I felt the urge to do something for my country and help the less fortunate realise their dreams."

In the mid-1980s, he started Sunway College, which lost money for more than a decade. In 1997, when the education business started making money, Cheah set up the Sunway Education Trust as a philanthropic vehicle. In 2010, he converted the trust into a social enterprise where all the institutions of the Sunway Education Group and profits were put under the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation. This was to ensure the foundation and the work it does would live on from one generation to the next.

Cheah believes in making the Sunway Group a place where talent makes a home. "The world is getting increasingly competitive and the war for talent is a real issue. We have to put our own house in order to attract and retain talent.

"We need to improve ourselves as a country, and as a community, because people are mobile today. It is my ongoing commitment to make Sunway the ideal place for talent," he says, adding that if young people find opportunities in good companies locally, there would be no reason for them to work abroad.

His daughter, Sarena, who is joint managing director of the Sunway Group, has been with the company for 20 years. What compels her to stay in the country when young people like her are looking abroad?

"Like every young person, I go where the opportunities are. Why am I here? I truly believe that my dad has built a very strong foundation in the Sunway Group, both in the corporate as well as CSR [corporate social responsibility] area. If you ask me, he is a deliverer of platforms. In the 20 years that I have worked with him, I have learnt a lot, especially the values that very much resonate with myself and siblings," she says.

The following is an excerpt from the interview with Cheah.

The Edge: Very often, we hear of parents telling their children studying overseas not to come back, but to make a life for themselves abroad. In your case, not only are you a provider of education facilities here, you have also involved your children in the business. Can you share your thinking on this?

Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah: We cannot stop people from doing what they do if there are inadequate opportunities in the country. Sometimes the children themselves don't want to come back, not because of what the parents tell them. People can exercise freedom, but we cannot speak for everyone. The world is getting increasingly competitive and war for talent is a real issue. We have to first put our own house in order for us to attract and retain talent. We need to improve ourselves as a country, and as a community, because people are mobile today. If they study overseas and if policies back home are not attractive to them, they don't come back.

It's just like any company. If the management of a company is not forward looking, not transparent, does not have good corporate governance and core values for society and community, then people can say, "Why should we work for a company like this?"

It is my ongoing commitment to make Sunway an ideal place for talent by providing the opportunities, by ensuring quality education is accessible to all and by providing training to improve productivity.

I am a true-blue Malaysian; I believe in this country. My grandchildren are the fifth generation in Malaysia. While I have amassed some money from my business, I will continue to give and contribute to the welfare and progress of the nation. I believe my children will contribute their fair share of good work to take the business to greater heights and give back to society.

Sarena [my daughter] and my two sons are here, working for the company. They grew up in the company because I don't believe in giving them top jobs when they are not ready — it cannot be sustained that way. They have to rise up the ranks, go through the mill. Achievement must be earned, not given. I believe they share my ideals and aspirations of being a true-blue Malaysian and will do their best for the country.

Are your children ready to take the baton from you?

Sarena is joint managing director. She is not executive chairman or president yet, so she is not. I am quite demanding, every one knows that. I won't say I am obsessive, but I am quite particular about certain things, like cleanliness. I am also against smoking and gambling.

Are you more demanding when it comes to your children?

I treat them equal to the staff so that they can learn together as a team. I want to make sure that after me, this company continues to grow and is sustainable. We are very much about meritocracy, we are colour blind, passport blind and religion blind when we deal with people and select talent.

Is this reflected in the diversity of your workforce?

We are well balanced. We see diversity as a strength, which can be very powerful for us in enhancing our competitiveness and upgrading our talent pool. I am an ethnic Chinese; many people think this is a Chinese company, but we are not. We are a Malaysian company and we want to build on this.

UPSKILLING

LEADING EMPLOYERS AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS LIKE SUNWAY PARTNER WITH US ON UPSKILLING INITIATIVES LIKE THE ASPIRING ACCOUNTANTS PROGRAMME AND ICAEW REGIONAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE TO MEET MALAYSIA'S NEED FOR 30,000 MORE CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS BY 2020.

Visit talentcorp.com.my to learn more

TalentCorp
MALAYSIA

Sunway survived a crippling crisis in 1997/98. Going forward, how do you see the potential of this country, in terms of enabling your stable of companies to continue to prosper after 57 years of independence?

Of course I see potential, otherwise I won't be reinvesting so much. We have a big stake in Malaysia, so the question of not being comfortable here is irrelevant.

I have weathered two economic crises, and I am proud to say I did not ask for any assistance of bailout from anyone. Neither did I ask for a haircut from the bankers.

Having said that, Malaysia is a blessed country. There are plenty of resources, big land masses and a relatively young population. We must embrace the spirit of moderation and diversity in race, religion, creed and culture. If we harness these assets well, our country will advance and prosper, especially with a young population. We can harness this young talent, give them good education, the right type of education. We must have good policies to enhance their skills, make them competitive and excel.

Like any other country, Malaysia is not perfect. What challenges do you see? What opportunities?

My greatest fear is religious and racial disharmony — this will destroy the country. Hopefully, all Malaysians understand this and do not allow the extremists and bigots to take over. Bigotry is a real threat to this country. It remains one of our biggest challenges that must be countered so that our country can advance. We have seen how extremism has led to the commitment of atrocities in other countries of late, and for what? Let's all live together — we know our differences, we respect each other, and there are plenty of opportunities under the Malaysian sun for every one.

As true-blue Malaysians, we should all speak up to stop this. The trouble with the silent majority is that if they continue to be silent, when the extremists take over, it is too late. I believe in speaking up so that the future is sustainable.

How can leaders like you contribute to ensure there is sustainability in Malaysia's economic growth and development, so that future generations can continue to enjoy a prosperous environment?

We must not rest on our laurels. At Sunway, we embrace our core values — integrity, humility and excellence. I believe that observing these key values will help us contribute to sustainable growth.

We also promote CSR in a big way. If more corporations participate actively in CSR, our society will become progressive and sustainable. At Sunway, we are committed to putting the right fundamental infrastructure in place. We will continue to invest in the hardware and software to contribute to nation building. We have invested more than RM200 million in road expansion and upgrading works. I have adopted six schools and contributed RM12.5 million for restoration and upgrading works. Classrooms are where children's lives are shaped. We must pursue an education system that grows in excellence and size.

What is your thinking on sustainability and within Sunway Group? How much focus is on this?

Sustainability is about building a culture that can be passed from one generation to another. I am passionate about education, and have devoted much of my personal time and energy promoting education.

On the business front, sustainability is imperative. When I first discovered this tin-mining wasteland [on which Sunway Group has developed a whole township], it was like a moonscape. I looked upon it as a great opportunity, as it was a place where there could

be economic life and where people could live, learn, work, play and be safe and healthy.

You can find earthworms here today as the whole eco-system has been restored. It was challenging because it involved brownfield redevelopment.

And to this day, we are discovering new ways to game-change growth for our communities in the township. The elevated BRT Sunway line, water treatment innovation and world-class partnerships we are exploring are some of the new ways we can give perpetual value to our communities.

How does the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation fit in with your philosophy?

I believe that to lead a fulfilling life, you should have a higher purpose, and making money is merely a product of that purpose. If you think about it, what we have done for ourselves dies with us. But what we do for others and the world remains forever. That's why I say, 'I aspire to inspire before I expire'.

I come from a small village in Perak called Pusing. I saw the effects of poverty and the deprivation of opportunities to study and the need to improve the well-being and prospects of the people. I was privileged to receive a good education in Malaysia and Australia, and as a result, I did quite well in business later on. Because of this, I felt the urge to do something for my country and help the less fortunate.

When I started Sunway College in the mid-1980s, I told myself that we cannot play around with children's education. We want to give future generations of Malaysians the right ingredients to excel in life, arm them with proper skills and knowledge to compete.

It was not easy then. We lost money for more than 10 years. After 12 or 13 years, the college started to make some money, that's when I thought the timing was right to put it in a trust.

I started the Sunway Education Trust in 1997 as a philanthropic vehicle because I believe that education is the most powerful weapon that can transform lives. I have always asked this question: What we are doing, is it sustainable over time? I wanted to build this not just for the generation of today, but the generations of tomorrow. So I began to think about converting the trust into a social enterprise, which is what you know now as the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation.

With the social enterprise model, profits from the institutions within the Sunway Education Group, the nation's largest social enterprise, will be ploughed back for scholarships, grants, research and development and expansion of facilities. This is not new in the West, but it is relatively new in the Far East. The Jeffrey Cheah Foundation has awarded more than RM165 million in scholarships to some 20,000 students since 1997.

Following the setting up of the foundation, we have achieved quite a few milestones. We have established links with Harvard, and set up the Jeffrey Cheah Research Institute for Southeast Asia. Hopefully, we will establish ties with Oxford and Cambridge soon.

Had I not transferred all the shares to the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation, I am not sure what would have happened one generation after this. Now, nobody can touch it. After me and my children, it will continue.

Today, the quality of private education has been compromised to a certain extent by the profit motive. What is your view on this?

There were opportunities to list the education group to raise funds, but I did not do it because there is a very clear line between what is business and what education is meant to do. The education group is for society, not for profit. When you list, management will always look at the bottom line because you have to pay dividends. We don't have this issue today. The shareholders don't demand anything except high standards, good quality students and quality results.

In recent times, Malaysia has been through some difficult times, and there has been a feeling of despair and pessimism on the ground. What is your advice during such times?

I am an optimist. We must remind one another that you and I have a part to play in restoring faith and optimism in the people. Inaction breeds doubt. Malaysians are resilient. Unity in diversity is our strength, and this must be emphasised over time.

We are all in the same boat, so why not row together? As with business, the tide will change. But if we row together, we can get somewhere promising much faster.

We went through two bad crises, which we handled quite well. Having said that, the mid-80s recession was bad for Sunway. We nearly lost everything. Then in 1997, the storm was even more devastating. So what did I do? That's where leadership comes in.

This time around, leadership is just as important. As leaders, we must continue to be optimistic. The good weather comes and goes, as long as we are breathing, we must stand up and overcome it. That's how I would say it. **E**





views from the top

Passionate about nation building

BY EMILY CHOW

Some believe that talent can be groomed. But when it comes to sustainability, Tan Sri Yong Poh Kon, the managing director of pewter manufacturer Royal Selangor International Sdn Bhd, believes something fundamental must be put in place first — education.

“The involvement of younger people in the business is important, and there are many routes to get them to be more [highly skilled], but fundamental to that is getting a strong educational background. Only then will you be able to sustain any particular business,” he opines. “In dealing with the brain drain, policies should target not only talent, but also potential talent, meaning primary and secondary school students.”

Yong is a vocal advocate of improving the nation’s education system and human capital pool, in particular promoting the use of English language in schools. He maintains a keen interest as a businessman as well as a parent and grandparent, and believes Malaysia’s declining standard of education is why talented individuals are leaving the country.

“Good talents in the country recognise the value that a good education can bring in the form of improved incomes and a better standard of living. If the country’s education system is not of the required standard, and alternative quality private education is beyond the means of many, talent will emigrate to countries with quality education in public schools,” Yong says. “The Malaysian diaspora in Singapore, Australia or Canada often cite good education for their children as the No 1 factor for leaving.”

On the part of Royal Selangor, it offers English language classes to employees in hopes of remedying the recruitment problems it faces. “We operate retail stores, apart from manufacturing, and find it extremely difficult to recruit school leavers with the necessary standard of English to communicate with tourists at a level commensurate with our branding. The same applies to staff in our export or online sales department,” says Yong.

“This problem is not unique to us, but also hotels, front office staff, information counters and so on. We have to face the fact that this is a globalised world and everyone uses [English as] an international language.

“It is not ideal though — we would prefer that the school system looks after such basic [requirements],” he continues. “But this way, it’s not only for the benefit of a company, but a tremendous benefit to the employee. If you analyse the background of people with the best-paying jobs in the country, English proficiency was key in their journey to where they are today. Unfortunately this pathway is now denied to the majority, because English is taught only as a subject. This isn’t enough, as it only takes up 11% of the school curriculum rather than the necessary 40% to 50% exposure needed for a sufficiently strong foundation in English.”

Yong’s own three children were first educated in public schools before being transferred to private schools and later, embarking on their tertiary education in the UK. They all returned to Malaysia.

“We [Yong and his wife] wanted them to come back, and found it important to make sure they have a link back here, so we kept in constant touch [with them when they were abroad], and they would come back during the holidays,” he recalls.

It worked. Today, his daughter is a homemaker, one son works at the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu) of the Prime Minister’s Department, while another is an executive director at Royal Selangor.

Yong himself returned home after finishing his degree in Australia. “When I came back, I worked here [at Royal Selangor] while spending some time at other organisations like the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM). There was no compulsion [for me to come back and work at Royal Selangor], but I thought my engineering skills were quite useful at that time, so those were put to use,” he says. “I started out as a works engineer, [the role of] which was to improve productivity.”

Yong’s involvement in various organisations and task forces speaks volumes about his beliefs and

contribution to the country. His credentials include being a former president of the FMM Council, board member of Bank Negara Malaysia and the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA), and co-chair of Pemudah (The Special Task Force to Facilitate Business). He is currently a member of the National Economic Council.

Yong’s son, Yoon Kit, is also interested in nation building. After 14 years at Royal Selangor, he decided to join Pemandu as he saw it as an opportunity to help shape the direction of the country.

“At Royal Selangor, I started out as a software engineer, developing IT systems and creating the online store back in 1999. I eventually worked [my way] up to group IT manager,” he says. “It wasn’t a family responsibility to join Royal Selangor, I just felt that I could contribute.”

Yoon Kit was recruited by Pemandu after he participated in the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) labs that helped shape each National Key Economic Area (NKEA). He is currently director of two NKEAs: business services and electrical and electronics (E&E).

“After joining the ETP labs in 2010, Pemandu requested some of its lab participants to immediately

help implement the projects as defined in the labs. I was initially hesitant, as I was very happy within my comfort zone of IT [at Royal Selangor],” he recalls.

But the more he thought about it, the more the challenge of the job appealed to him, and he signed up just as the ETP roadmap was launched in October 2010.

“On a macro level, talent sustainability in my job is to encourage projects that attract high-income jobs for Malaysians. Companies need to think larger than just cheap labour, and to have a more sustainable view of their industries in the long term,” he opines.

Overall though, policies and companies can only do so much. At the end of the day, a significant part of talent sustainability lies within the individual’s desire to contribute.

“Offering financial benefits to Malaysians currently overseas to return can only go so far. After the benefits run out, it takes very little for the returnees to find fault and leave again,” says Yoon Kit. “Malaysians need to have a sense of belonging to want to come back. They need to feel that their country needs them as much as they want to make it better.”



Good talents in the country recognise the value that a good education can bring in the form of improved incomes and a better standard of living. If the country's education system is not of the required standard, and alternative quality private education is beyond the means of many, talents will emigrate to countries with quality education in public schools.





A compelling reason to return

BY ANNA TAING

Early this year, Tan Sri Lee Shin Cheng, the founder of IOI Group, announced the appointment of his two sons as CEOs of the two listed flagships in his stable — IOI Corp Bhd and IOI Properties Bhd.

While Shin Cheng, 74, is executive chairman of both concerns and therefore still very much in control, he is passing the baton to his sons and on their shoulders now rest the task of taking the corporate group to its next level of growth and ensuring the growth is sustainable for future generations.

Datuk Lee Yeow Chor, 47, is the eldest son and no stranger to the corporate world, having joined IOI Group some 20 years ago in 1994. Lee Yeow Seng is just 35 and has stayed relatively low profile, that is until his recent appointment as the top guy at IOI Properties.

For Yeow Chor, it was only a matter of time before he took the reins after coming back to Malaysia in the early 1990s. The question of not returning to work for the family business did not arise.

He was exposed to the business from very young. “My father used to bring me with him to business dinners and on visits to construction sites and plantations. I had already cultivated an interest in the business, so naturally when I came back, I knew that in time to come, I would join the family business,” he tells *The Edge* in an interview.

Even so, he did not join the group immediately. Instead, he worked in the civil service for four years, first with the Attorney-General’s Chambers and then in the judiciary service. His last posting was magistrate.

“It was a good opportunity to understand the workings of the government at different levels. It makes it easier for me to navigate around government departments. In any business, there will be a certain degree of interaction with government departments and officers,” he says.

In 1994, Yeow Chor joined IOI as general manager. He acknowledges that for working professionals who have to develop their careers from the bottom up, the consideration of whether they want to come back to Malaysia to work is very different from those who will help run a family business.

He believes that students with overseas exposure are “global citizens” who can set up base anywhere in the world. Hence, to attract such talent, there must be a compelling proposition.

In this regard, he says Malaysia is lucky. “It is well located geographically, within the economic corridors of power in the emerging world — China, India and Asean. It is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, where the people are able to speak the languages of three countries. This is the inherent advantage.”

The fact that Malaysia is also resource rich and has been posting strong economic growth in recent years gives it an edge. In the second quarter of this year, Malaysia’s 6.4% expansion in gross domestic product (GDP) was one of the highest in the region.

“While Malaysia has this inherent advantage, in deciding whether it is a good place to do business or work, [people] will also consider the vibrancy of the society. As people say, a large part of the success of a business depends on the talent it has. So, whether we can attract the right talent to Malaysia depends on, among other things, the living environment.”

This is where Yeow Chor thinks there are some worrying underlying trends which, if not arrested, could deter not just talent from coming back, but also investment.

“Some recent incidents show a certain degree of rising polarisation in the racial and religious sentiment in the country. There are now some campaigns and movements by the media and civil rights organisations calling for moderation, a moderate Malaysia.

“When it comes to attracting talent from a variety of backgrounds, it is about how open the country is. People will feel uncomfortable if there is prejudice and certain activities are not allowed on the pretext of racial or religious sensitivities, like certain concerts not being allowed.”

Malaysia, he notes, has a smaller expatriate population, per capita wise, compared with some of the other countries in the region. To a certain extent, he explains, this has to do with the economic structure of a country where expats tend to be in the services sector. This is still small in Malaysia and needs to be developed further.

It also has to do with the perception of Malaysia before expats come or talents return. “I find that most of the people who have come here say they like to live in this country. The problem is, before they make the decision to come and live here, it is based on their impression of the country’s environment and living conditions — food, accommodation, the quality of and access to education, the people their children will mix with and how open society is.”

As one of the largest groups of companies in Malaysia, what does it do to create an environment that draws talent today?

Yeow Chor says there must be a culture of communication that is open and less paternalistic as young people today look for transparency and openness. As a leader, he believes in the need to learn and refresh himself to keep up with developments. “When you talk about transforming an organisation, as a leader we must start transforming ourselves. If we don’t refresh, how can we expect others to believe that this is a progressive company?”

This is why he is a member of the Young Presidents’ Organisation (YPO), of which he is the 2013/14 chair of the Malaysian chapter. The YPO is a global leadership organisation whose motto is Better Leaders Through Education and Idea Exchange.

While education is important, Yeow Chor opines that the exchange of ideas is just as crucial for a leader to develop. YPO members gather monthly to discuss issues that extend beyond business, such as family and other matters, he says. In this way, leaders learn to be a better member of the family, community and society.

Yeow Chor recognises that, apart from remuneration, the younger generation also seeks to work in companies that have a strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda.

A year after joining IOI, and together with management, Yeow Chor introduced a set of vision, core values and principles for the group. “Even at the time, we recognised that there had to be ‘balanced’ commercial success, which takes into account the interests of all stakeholders — employees, environment and community.

“Back then, CSR was not in vogue, but we already had this mindset that to achieve sustainable success is not about pleasing one set of stakeholders. The three Ps become important — planet, profit and people. Having this kind of overall consideration is important. It is not so much about CSR, but corporate responsibility.”

CSR, Yeow Chor says, is ancillary to IOI’s business. One of its many initiatives is Yayasan Tan Sri Lee Shin Cheng, a foundation wholly funded by IOI Group that focuses on a range of areas, in-



A large part of the success of a business depends on the talent it has. So, whether we can attract the right talent to Malaysia depends on, among other things, the living environment.



cluding education, human capital development, community building and philanthropic work.

What needs to be in place to ensure a sustainable pipeline of talent?

Apart from living conditions, Yeow Chor says it is income. While Malaysia enjoys a low cost of living, its professionals take home one of the lowest salaries in the region. In this regard, he says current efforts to make Malaysia a high-income nation by 2020 is a step in the right direction.

“Salaries have to be substantially revised to catch up with regional and global peers. We are beginning to see this happening due to companies going overseas,” he says.

As a parent, does he see a future for his children in Malaysia? Yeow Chor believes that when children are educated overseas and exposed to different people and cultures, they become global citizens. Many still find Malaysia a platform they will work in, whether it is running a family business or setting up their own business, because Malaysia is still their home.

“It most likely will not be their only base because there is a big range of playing fields for them out there where they are comfortable through their exposure abroad.

“When I travel overseas as chairman of the MPOC [Malaysian Palm Oil Council], I meet Malaysians in various countries and I can see that their heart is still in Malaysia because of their family and the lifestyle here,” he says, adding that “my children will have close affinity to Malaysia despite the opportunities in other countries.”





Tapping opportunities back home

BY SARAH VOON

Even from a young age, Gaik Wong believed that Malaysia held many opportunities for her to tap into. The founder and managing director of The Chicken Rice Shop (TCRS Restaurants Sdn Bhd) was not wrong. Coming home after her tertiary education in Australia was indeed the right move for her, she says. "Malaysia has always had big opportunities, then and now."

Her daughter and CEO of The Chicken Rice Shop, Wong Kah Lin, sits next to her in their branch at The Gardens shopping mall in Mid Valley City. Both are dressed in bright pink polo shirts emblazoned with the company's logo.

"All my children went overseas to study, but they have all returned to Malaysia," Gaik beams proudly at her only daughter.

The Wong family seems to have gone against the tide. So, why did they return? Gaik believes that family plays a primary role in this, but there is a deeper conviction in place.

"There are family ties, the parental network and the opportunities. You have friends that you have grown up with. Your roots are here in Malaysia," she says, gesturing in the way a woman passionate about a cause would. But she isn't done.

"At the end of the day, you also have to ask yourself: Do I believe in this country?" It is the way she says it, with such conviction, that leaves us speechless. A physically imposing woman, Gaik surely could intimidate a crowd with just her words. But then she breaks into a big smile and continues.

"There is just something about Malaysia. My daughter-in-law is Singaporean, but over the years I have seen her bloom in Malaysia," she says, chuckling a little. "You may think there are greener pastures elsewhere, but the green pastures are right here."

Kah Lin, who has been nodding in agreement all this while, says a popular topic of discussion for them at dinner time is why Malaysians are leaving the coun-

try. It is hard for this mother and daughter to imagine living so far apart.

"When the children were younger, I was still building my career. But I would make sure that I found time to bond with them. Over the weekends, we would go swimming or play tennis and then have dinner together," Gaik reminisces.

"I guess you can say that I am 'selfish' because I want my children around. It is not the amount of time you spend with them, but the quality of the time," she adds.

This sage advice is the first of many memorable one-liners from her. "A family that plays together, stays together" is another. "And works together, too!" Kah Lin chimes in, eliciting a laugh from her mother.

The mother and daughter are evidently a tight-knit pair with much in common. Does Kah Lin share her mother's sentiments about Malaysia?

"I wanted to do something Malaysian because we are both proud of being Malaysians. At the time, chicken rice was seen as 'roadside' or 'hawker' food. We saw the opportunity to create a space for all Malaysians, regardless of race, to sit down and enjoy a meal of chicken rice together," Kah Lin says.

With Gaik's existing network in the chicken industry and Kah Lin's youthful passion, the two embarked on a business endeavour that would only strengthen their relationship. "We have always been close. I am the only daughter, so it is quite natural for me to be close to my mom. But we got closer when the business started," Kah Lin says.

"It is quite a healthy relationship, but some of my friends would call it 'abnormal' because our relationship is more like best friends than mother-daughter," she laughs. "It makes a difference in the way we work."

"And we love to eat together, too!" Gaik points out. Though in the food and beverage industry, the lines between work and food may blur a little. The lines are also blurred when it comes to work and their personal lives.

"We live and breathe the business," Kah Lin says. "A typical day is like this: We come into the office in the morning and discuss what is happening that day, and



There is just something about Malaysia ... You may think there are greener pastures elsewhere, but the green pastures are right here.



it is not necessarily about work. Later on, we go home for dinner and discuss work. Then, I will go back to my place. If I get an email about work or see something on TV related to the business, I will call my mom up to talk about it."

Surely there has to be a limit? No, Kah Lin doesn't believe so. "There is no clear distinction between what is work and what is family time. I think that's how a family business should be. We believe that our relationship can also be applied to the staff and we treat them like family. This is one of the values that we inculcate in the company."

Gaik agrees. "We are one big family. There have been so many times that I have been asked how many children I have and I answer, 900! That's my brood of chickens. I am the mother hen," she declares.

Indeed, she is. But the mother hen is also quick to stress that Kah Lin is the boss of the business. "One mountain cannot accommodate two tigers," she says. "When there is something we disagree on, we agree to disagree."

Kah Lin interjects, "I let her decide because she is the boss." But Gaik insists that it is she who lets her daughter decide. "Okay, she lets me decide and lets me make mistakes so that I will learn from them," Kah Lin relents.

"The way we see things may be different because there is a generational gap, but I have to let her try. Regardless, there are always challenges in a business," Gaik reasons. "There are good and bad times, but there's nothing like having your loved one with you to share the bad times. Then we come up with solutions together."

The pair smile at each other before continuing their playful banter over plates of fragrant, steaming hot chicken rice. An elderly lady walks in as we are having lunch, and the pair get up to greet her with hugs and kisses. They chat for a few minutes and return to the meal.

"She is our No 1 customer. She has been coming here every day since we opened this branch," Kah Lin smiles. This warm display of welcome is truly Malaysian hospitality at its best.



Making meritocracy a way of life

BY EMILY CHOW

Many of those who pursue an education abroad come to a crossroads at the end of their studies — to stay where they are or to come home. But for Ruben Emir Gnanalingam, the path was always a straight road.

After completing his A-Levels at Eton College, a degree in economics at the London School of Economics (LSE) and postgraduate studies in information technology, the current CEO of Westports Holdings Bhd came home in 1999.

“At the end of the day, it is a family business; I had to join it. While it [the decision to come back] is always a choice, it’s an obligation as well,” he says. “I didn’t mind. I think sometimes you grow up knowing your responsibility, so you prepare for it. But I also like Malaysia. I don’t see myself being more comfortable living anywhere else.”

Westports was founded in 1994 by Ruben’s father, Tan Sri G Gnanalingam, who introduced the company policy of hiring mainly locals. In fact, there are only two foreigners in its current workforce of more than 4,000, both of whom are Singaporeans.

“Let’s put it this way, everyone at Westports can speak Malay,” Ruben chuckles. “My father wanted to provide a chance to groom local talent, so he always pushed for hiring locally. Only when we couldn’t find a particular skill locally would we hire a foreigner.”

In addition to encouraging homegrown talent within the company, Gnanalingam senior fostered meritocracy to ensure the retention of talent, something even his own son wasn’t exempt from. When Ruben first came on board in 2000, and again in 2004, he took on non-executive positions before progressing to his current position of CEO.

He started out by heading the IT and marketing departments — the former because that was what he knew best and the latter because sales is a leader’s primary task.

“When I joined the company, we had a five-year plan, and talking to the media was just the last part of it,” he recalls. “In that plan, I had to do three things: gain the respect of the staff, gain favour from the clients and gain trust from the board. I had to gain all three elements from three different constituencies before [being] made CEO. So, we run everything merit-based as a family as well.”

Ruben felt comfortable returning home to a company he knew would be run on merit. “That was how we grew up. I knew I was going to be rewarded if I worked hard and did the right thing. We were taught from young that we had to play our roles very carefully in the family business.

“My father told me from day one that if he found someone better [than me] to run the company and enhance shareholder value, he would let me go because if he didn’t, it would restrict the company and shareholders. I concurred. If there is someone better, why should I hold the company back?”

Despite Westports’ policy of meritocracy, there have been times when the company was not able to retain its talent. “I had an employee leave [to work at a port in the UK], and although he may not have wanted to leave the company, he did want to leave the country because he did not want to raise his children in an environment where merit isn’t the only thing that counts,” Ruben recalls.

“He said it very openly. That, in so many points of his life, he was reminded that merit isn’t the only thing that matters. He said, ‘I don’t want my children growing up thinking that this is the way the world works, because it shouldn’t be this way.’

“For a lot of people working overseas, this is a key reason [why they don’t come back], because meritocracy leads to job satisfaction and security, knowing that if I do my best, I will be rewarded,” he continues. “That’s what people need to feel secure in their jobs, to know that they can progress when the time is right if they have done their best. The uncertainty of not knowing is what people have issues with.”

Besides the reassurance of career progression, Ruben reckons that providing monetary rewards is another way to ensure talent retention. “As we become a high-income economy, and once our quality of life reaches developed nation standards, more graduates will want to come back, as at the end of the day, it is about money and the standard of living.

“If they feel they can come back and have as good a standard of living as they did abroad, they will do so. We call it a brain drain, but do we have enough money to pay for the brain?” he says.

Ruben recalls a time when salaries in Malaysia were stagnant due to the country’s zero-inflation policy. But wages here are now catching up with those in developed countries.

“If companies understand that we’re moving towards this scale [of being a high-income nation], and people have to be paid accordingly, that’s okay. But people also need to understand that unfortunately, if companies move towards this scale, they have to increase the prices of their goods,” he explains. “So we’re going to have a few years of inflation, mainly because we have to catch up with the zero inflation we’ve had for a long time.”

While there is only so much one can do about inflation, what companies can do to retain talent is to think in the way an employee would — by considering their long-term career path. This combines the strategies of offering better wages and meritocracy.

“Let’s not just consider how much an employee makes in a year, because that figure might never increase,” Ruben says. “Look at the life cycle of someone’s career prospects — how they can move up in Malaysia and how much they can earn after a certain point. When this is better [here] than that [abroad], there will be an influx [of talent]. People from other countries will start to look here.”

Another strategy that can be used to retain talent is providing educational opportunities to help improve their skill sets and employability.

“Westports provides the staff with a lot of training, and we try to promote from within when we can. Knowing they have an equal chance of moving up [the ranks] gives encouragement to a lot of employees. You have to make sure people are well compensated for what they do,” says Ruben. “For those who we feel have potential, we invest in them in terms of executive education and in-house programmes.”

Finally, according to Ruben, something that an employer can do, and which would make a world of a difference, is simply to understand its employees. “Listening to your employees is crucial. You have to be alert to their needs and be in tune with what they are facing, especially their lifestyle, because their needs will change.

“You may think you are giving them a great increment, for example, but if the market has changed dramatically and they are worse off than they were before in terms of their standard of living, then [your increment is] not really an improvement, even though you think you have given a lot more.”

Since Westports’ listing on the stock exchange last year, many employees have become shareholders. This is part of Ruben’s vision of fostering a family culture in the workplace, along with innovation and performance.

Meanwhile, Ruben hopes that his two young sons will choose to remain in Malaysia when they grow up. “Will they work at Westports too? Only if they want to and if they qualify. The same rules will have to apply to them, and they will have to go through the same process I did.

“Getting experience abroad is always a good thing. I would expect them to come back, but the question is, will the environment be right for them to come back to? If not, I wouldn’t wish it upon them either. But I’ll play my role in making it so.”



Let’s not just consider how much an employee makes in a year, because that figure might never increase. Look at the life cycle of someone’s career prospects — how they can move up in Malaysia and how much they can earn after a certain point.





the intelligentsia

Many Malaysians who have gone abroad still hold the country close to their hearts and have strong views on how things can be better. Former Universiti Malaya professor Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Cambridge University's Professor Arokia Nathan and Universiti Putra Malaysia's Dr Chau De Ming discuss what Malaysia is doing right and what can be improved.

Focus on what matters

BY JENNIFER JACOBS

Jomo Kwame Sundaram believes in telling it like it is. The former Universiti Malaya professor, who was a leading scholar and expert on the political economy of development in the country, feels that Malaysia's current education system is dysfunctional and the privatisation of the education sector since the mid-1980s has resulted in a talent pool that does not meet the actual needs of the economy, let alone anticipate future needs.

"If you're an investor in selling educational credentials, you basically look for those areas from which you can get a fairly high return on investment. And invariably, these have been for professional courses, which do not require much equipment. So you have an underfunding of education, say,

in engineering, or other areas where you not only need a certain degree of professional competence but often, equipment to train the students," he observes.

Jomo, who was professor of applied economics at the Faculty of Economics and Administration at Universiti Malaya, used to be a thorn in the side of the authorities because of his often unflinching views of what the country actually needed and his refusal to sugar coat what he thought as a matter of political expedience.

Today, as assistant director-general of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations' economic and social development department, he is just as outspoken when asked what it would take to ensure sustainability in Malaysia.

"There has been great faith that somehow or other, the private educa-

tion sector would meet the needs of the economy. But what we have seen is more investment in legal programmes, accounting and a number of other areas where the hardware requirements are modest. So, the private sector is not going to respond to the needs of the country in a way that is required. And the public sector has been handicapped by the politics of higher education opportunities, from doing so," he says.

Jomo feels that Malaysia would have been one of the few countries with the financial as well as human resources to have overcome this had there been some foresight and long-term planning and execution. "Unfortunately, this has been lacking. So, the result is that as and when you have an increase in a demand, say, a need for particular kinds of engineers for either construction projects or something else, this demand almost invariably has to be met by foreign companies through joint ventures because domestic engineering firms are usually not in a position to respond adequately."

So Malaysia finds itself in a precarious situation where its education system is not generating much-needed resources. "In fact, the formal education system provided by the government has been very slow to adjust to changing circumstances and situations.

During [former prime minister Tun Dr] Mahathir's time, the way you responded to the need for greater talent in ICT (information and communications technology) was to create a new university.

"But you can't keep doing that for every type of new talent that you need. You need to reform the existing educational institutions as well as be much more responsive," he charges.

This has created a problem in perception. "There's a lot of cynicism in the private sector about Malaysian public university graduates, some

cynicism about Malaysian private university graduates and a huge premium attached to so-called foreign credentials, which are often not well-deserved as it is usually a proxy for language facility [in other words, they speak good English].

"A major problem is the inability of the public school system to respond to needs. This is part of the running down of the public sector more generally, but it is especially an indictment of educational spending," he says.

How so? "Government spending on higher education is among the highest in the world. But what are the performance indicators? I think by almost everybody's admission, they're pretty lousy. Not because the government is not spending enough money. But because you have a neglect of the challenges of educational reform."

He contrasts the situation in Malaysia with that of Finland. "How does a country, which was relatively poor until Nokia came along, become No 1 in the world in terms of education performance indicators? Much of its education reforms have been in the last three decades, seeing a significant improvement in the recent past. So it can be done."

Jomo thinks great change can be effected with relatively simple measures. Even one as simple as school feeding programmes, which if done properly, can result in huge knock-on effects. "School feeding programmes are used in many parts of the world to achieve multiple objectives. You train a generation of children to recognise what good nutrition is and you try to meet a child's developmental nutrient needs. So even though they may be eating junk at home, or for the poorer children, not eating enough, some of their nutrient needs would be met through the school meals."

He talks about how China took the idea of school meals in poverty-stricken areas and turned it into something substantial with great benefit. "Six years ago, I was invited to attend China's International Poverty Day and its minister for poverty eradication at the time asked for some ideas.

"Two years ago, he was holding a small lunch to celebrate his retirement, and he thanked me for the help and advice I had given. Frankly, I didn't know what he was talking about because I didn't remember suggesting anything extraordinary. Then, he told me that they had taken up the suggestion to start a school meal programme in poverty-stricken areas."

Jomo had suggested a school breakfast programme, his intention being twofold — the children would get a good meal at school, and this would act as an incentive for the parents to send their children to school rather than keep them at home to work on the farm.

But how the minister had taken

and applied this relatively simple idea blew his mind. "For the school programme, there had to be a dietician involved. China is a big country and what people eat is different in each of the provinces.

"So, the dietician had to ensure that the food was a bit different every day so that the pupils would not be bored eating the same food every day. They got the children to understand why it was important to eat some things, like certain types of vegetables that they may not have liked because they were too bitter. The dietician would explain to the children why these vegetables were good for them and the children, in turn, would go home and convey the message to their parents," he says.

But it didn't end with that. To cook the food for the children, the schools needed supplies. And the more local the food, the better. They got the local farmers to grow healthy food and since no individual farmer can produce all the food needed all year long, it encouraged them to cooperate with each other.

"And it was these cooperatives that became important in encouraging the farmers to grow certain types of vegetables. And since everyone produced a surplus of these vegetables, the healthy food became available in the local markets as well. So, people's eating habits slowly began to change and they started eating foods that they may not have had before," Jomo explains.

This was not all. Because it was their own children consuming the food in the schools, the farmers had to be careful that the food was grown safely, without the use of pesticides. This meant that they developed new and safer eating standards.

"Basically, the minister started giving me a lot of credit, even for things I had not suggested but which were the result of simply introducing one nutritious school meal a day for the children. So, you can see that what seems to be a relatively simple idea actually has so many facets to it," says Jomo.

And the minister was very proud because the programme had been a success in more ways than one. In fact, because of this programme, the children in poorer areas were much healthier, according to various nutrition indicators, than middle-class children in urban areas.

Would this reform be relevant in Malaysia? "Why not?" asks Jomo. "Right now, there are some lunch programmes in the schools here, but where does the food come from? It is so much easier to go and buy it wholesale from the big farms that use pesticides. But if you take the trouble to encourage small farmers to cooperate and meet the contract, the side effects are much greater. You change the profile of not only what is eaten in school, but what is available on the market. And this is partly what I am promoting right now."

If you take the trouble to encourage small farmers to cooperate and meet the contract, the side effects are much greater. You change the profile of not only what is eaten in school, but what is available on the market.



Concerted effort needed for talent development

BY NURUL IMAN DIMYATI

Madison, the capital of Wisconsin, is a picturesque city nestled in the heart of the US. Blessed with many parks and lakes, it attracts people from across the globe, including students. "I still think about it from time to time," confesses an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Chau De Ming, 32, graduated with a bachelor of science degree in biochemistry before pursuing his doctorate in pharmacology at Cornell University's Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences in New York. His last few years in the US were spent working as a research fellow at a top cancer research institute, the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Chau had made the US his home for almost 12 years. He even made an effort to look for working opportunities there. Had he been successful, Malaysia would have lost another brilliant mind in the field of science to another country.

"The biggest advantage there is that they have a really high aggregation of people who are knowledgeable in very specific fields. If I have a question, I can always pick up the phone and call someone to get advice. Another advantage is the labs are well equipped and they have people who are highly skilled in using those machines and equipment," says Chau of the advantages of a top US institution.

He believes that people stay on in these types of institutes because a good, stimulating and engaging environment is provided. These establishments possess a good support system that makes sustaining talent a non-issue for them. It is something that comes naturally when an institution provides a working ecosystem for its members.

Malaysia is fortunate that Chau returned home. He says although he knew all along that he would come

back, he did not know when. One of the pull factors, he recalls, was knowing what the country meant to him. "This [Malaysia] is where I grew up, where my family is. Coming home felt natural and was the right thing to do," he says.

Chau also came home with a determination to contribute ideas and knowledge in a field that he was passionate about. "Malaysia's science field is growing and I believe I can contribute to it. I have some ideas and knowledge that may help fill in the gaps here," he says.

For almost two years since his return, he has worked as a senior lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia, teaching aspiring scientists at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. Every day, he soaks up the different perspectives and viewpoints on science and research.

"It is synergistic how you have different groups of colleagues where everyone brings in different knowledge. It is like a puzzle. Everyone is bringing in pieces of a puzzle and trying to form a complete picture. So, I see myself as someone who is just a piece of puzzle. My role is to bring in that piece to help other people complete that picture."

Chau acknowledges that the field of science is still relatively young in Malaysia compared with the West. It is still maturing and developing. He says they are still trying to find the best approach.

Even in terms of funding, what Malaysia has is small compared with the West. Nonetheless, Chau feels that as a whole, Malaysia has invested a lot of money in science compared with many of the other countries in the region. The challenge, time and again, is utilising what we already have.

"It is limited, but through careful strategising, working closely with collaborators and working smart, we can do it. We must all support each other, not just through money, but through facilities support and human cap-

ital support. Even if money is limited, with all this support, we can go a long way," he says.

There is no shortage of things to discover here, it is just a matter of capitalising on what already exists. For the past four years, Chau has been trying to connect with fellow Malaysian scientists from across the globe via various platforms, including social media. He started a Facebook group, Malaysian Scientists Abroad, as a place for fellow scientists to connect with one another. Perhaps, the next step for them is to register as a society or a non-profit organisation.

Currently, they are finding ways to best utilise the collective knowledge of this group of talents.

"It is important to find something that we can do as a community where we can have both local Malaysians and those overseas collaborate on projects that will benefit Malaysians," Chau says.

He adds that the growth of the science field in Malaysia is good from an across-the-board perspective. The scene is improving, but he cautions that it does not mean there is no further room for improvement. It is about striking a balance between quantity and quality.

"If you want to achieve talent sustainability, it will require a concerted effort from various parties and agencies to come together and come up with a plan to do it, not just talking about it. This requires good leadership and a good support team that will be able to get us to that goal."



Drawing on the diaspora

BY JENNIFER JACOBS

There are ways to work with top Malaysian talent abroad, even if they are not willing to return home for now. Most of them have roots in the country and would be willing to work with local organisations in their areas of expertise. Either way, Malaysia stands to benefit.

Take Professor Arokia Nathan, the Chair of Photonic Systems and Displays at Cambridge University's Department of Engineering, for instance. His area of speciality is the very thing Malaysia is looking to go into in a big way — the Internet of Things.

Not that he calls it that. If you talked to him, he would tell you that he works on flexible electronics and more recently, how to adapt flexible electronics to wearable electronics.

"This means we would like to create autonomous systems. We wear these things without wires, so a lot of the work goes into self-energised devices that have radios on them and can communicate wirelessly. So it's really an integration of different technologies with the right material selection," says Arokia.

"We are talking about the gateway to the Internet of Things. These things rely a lot on information and how to generate this information, how you acquire this comes from devices like these. So it's more like a gateway."

How is he collaborating with Malaysian scientists or businesses? Through Collaborative Research in Engineering, Science and Technology (Crest). Basically, as an ex-Malaysian in Cambridge, Arokia showed up on the radar screen of Talent Corporation Malaysia Bhd which, in turn, hooked him up with Crest and Khazanah Nasional Bhd.

"I have always been quite fascinated with TalentCorp because it is good at reaching out to Malaysians abroad and finding ways to work with them. There are plenty of Malaysians throughout the UK and I

think TalentCorp has made a significant effort in trying to connect with these people and bring them closer to Malaysia. Had it not been for its efforts, I don't think my connection would have happened," he remembers.

Now, Arokia is working with Khazanah and Crest on setting up some major programmes with Cambridge University in his particular area of specialisation. "We are trying to set up a means to bring people over, exchange talent and create cutting edge technology that will be of benefit to Malaysia. These are the things we are working on to nurture the area and hopefully, everything falls into place and we are able to announce it in a big way."

The main thing, he says, is to create a relationship between Cambridge and Crest and consequently, anything that is associated with Crest. At the moment, things are still in the making and he is not able to divulge too many details.

Arokia says while not all Malaysians or ex-Malaysians abroad are willing to return for whatever reason, that is no reason the country cannot benefit from their expertise. He points out that many Malaysians in the US and Europe enjoy their work and the facilities that are provided for them in these countries. "They enjoy the atmosphere there to do high-end research and I don't see them relocating to Malaysia full-time. But they will be very happy to help and be connected to the growth of Malaysia. That's the way I felt. I benefited from a first-class education there in the 1970s, and I think the opportunities and basic level of education was really phenomenal. And I think it's time I give something back."

Arokia was born in Penang, and studied at St Xavier's Institution before going overseas to study engineering. He did his doctorate in electrical engineering at the University of Alberta in Canada, worked at LSI Logic Corp and then at ETH Zurich in Switzerland, one of the leading international universities for technology and natural sciences. He moved to the UK in 2006 to take up the Sumitomo Chair of Nanotechnology at the London Centre for Nanotechnology.

How did he end up in Cambridge? "We have always worked closely with Cambridge. For us, academic life is very much research-centric. Teaching is something we all have to do regardless of where we are, and in research there are very few boundaries, so we have always worked closely with Cambridge folk for many things."

Arokia loves it there, and is not likely to return anytime soon, like many of the Malaysian diaspora scattered throughout the UK, US and Europe.

Nevertheless, he thinks Malaysia has a lot going for it. And if the country can get its act together in terms of talent, the sky is the limit. "I think all it needs is a more competitive spirit to create mechanisms that can create top talent. Malaysia is already producing top talent, but maybe you just need a larger number of these people in different areas."



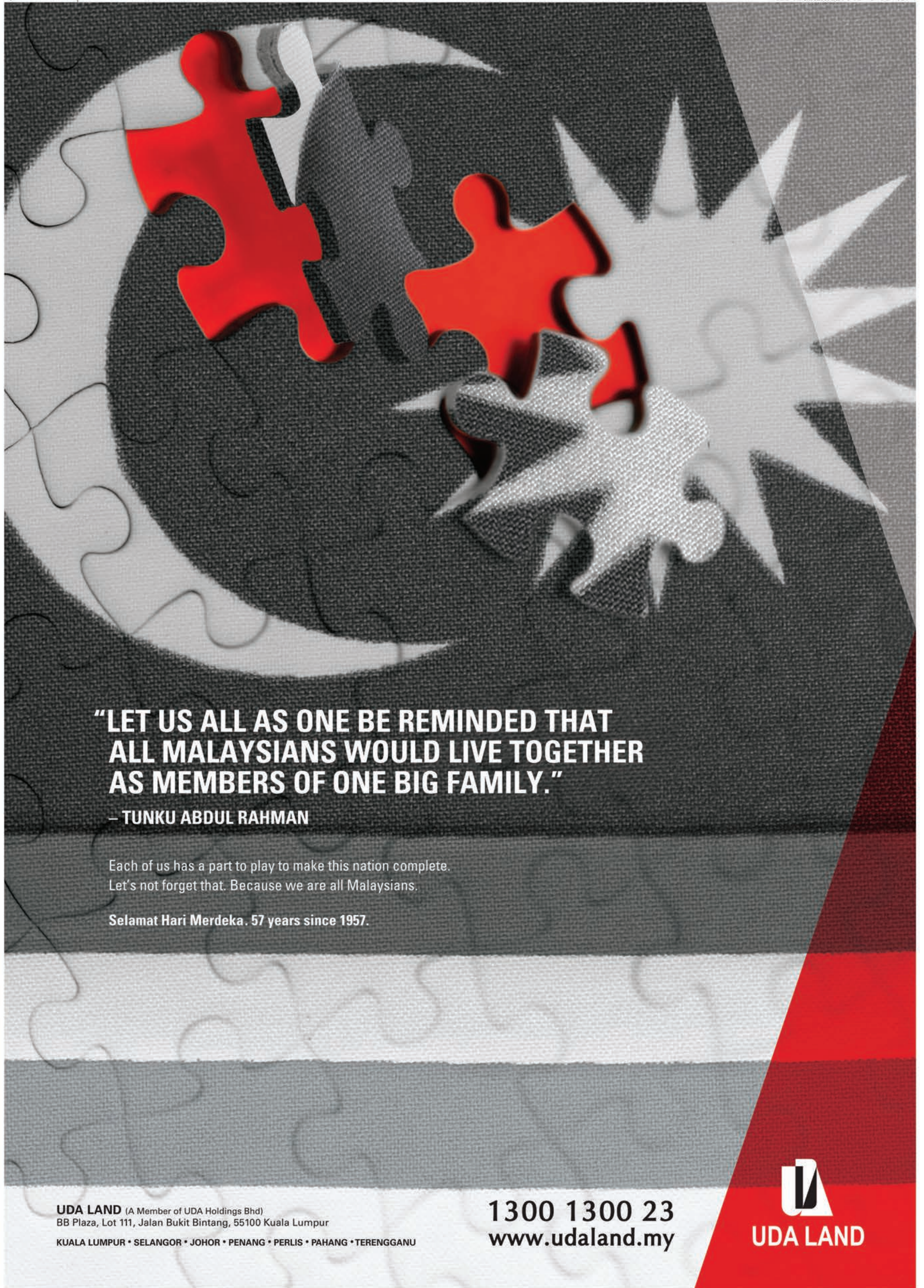
REP
Returning Expert Programme

**GLOBAL
MALAYSIAN
NETWORK**

MALAYSIA'S STABLE AND GROWING ECONOMY IS PRODUCING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GLOBAL TALENT LIKE DE-MING AND FELLOW MALAYSIAN SCIENTISTS TO LEVERAGE ON THEIR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE, EITHER BY RETURNING HOME TO WORK OR CONTRIBUTING FROM ABROAD.

Visit myworklife.my to learn more

TalentCorp
MALAYSIA



“LET US ALL AS ONE BE REMINDED THAT ALL MALAYSIANS WOULD LIVE TOGETHER AS MEMBERS OF ONE BIG FAMILY.”

– TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

Each of us has a part to play to make this nation complete. Let's not forget that. Because we are all Malaysians.

Selamat Hari Merdeka. 57 years since 1957.

UDA LAND (A Member of UDA Holdings Bhd)
BB Plaza, Lot 111, Jalan Bukit Bintang, 55100 Kuala Lumpur
KUALA LUMPUR • SELANGOR • JOHOR • PENANG • PERLIS • PAHANG • TERENGGANU

1300 1300 23
www.udaland.my



UDA LAND