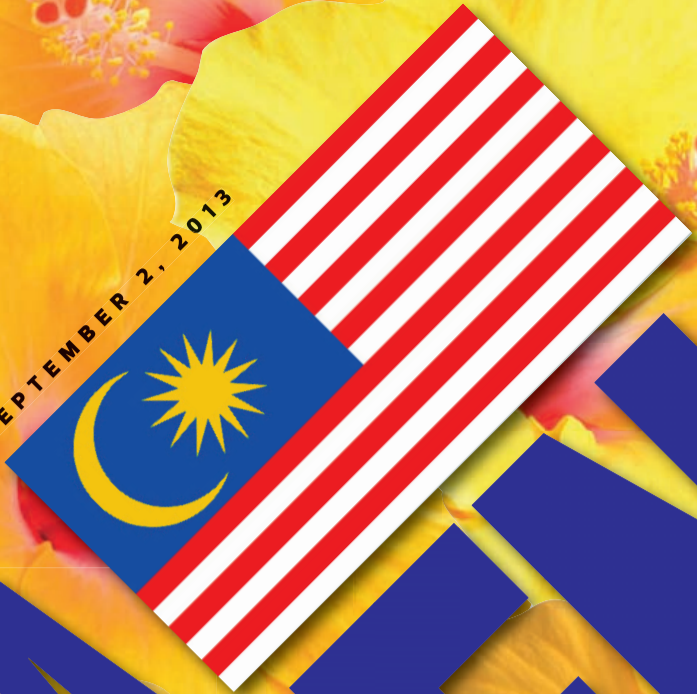




SEPTEMBER 2, 2013



THE EDGE  
MERDEKA FOCUS

# MAKING DIFFERENCE

IN COLLABORATION WITH

**TalentCorp**  
MALAYSIA



REUTERS

## CONTENTS

- 4**  
CEOS BUILDING ON  
WHAT THEY HAVE  
TODAY FOR FUTURE  
GENERATIONS
- 10**  
CHANGEMAKERS AND  
THEIR PROJECTS
- 12**  
HOW ORGANISATIONS  
ARE MAKING  
A DIFFERENCE
- 18**  
DIVERSITY ADVOCATES  
WHO ARE IMPROVING  
FEMALE PARTICIPATION  
IN THE WORKFORCE

## EDITORIAL

SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR  
AZAM ARIS

PROJECT EDITOR  
ANNA TAING

WRITERS  
ELAINE BOEY, JENNIFER JACOBS,  
THO LI MING, EMILY CHOW, SARAH VOON

EXECUTIVE EDITOR  
OOI INN LEONG

CHIEF COPY EDITOR  
MAH PIN PIN

ART DIRECTOR  
SHARON KHOH

DESIGNER  
LEE WAN YEE

## CORPORATE

GROUP CEO & PUBLISHER  
HO KAY TAT

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
AU FOONG YEE

DEPUTY MANAGING DIRECTOR  
LIM SHIEW YUIN

## ADVERTISING &amp; MARKETING

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER  
SHARON TEH (012) 313 9056

SENIOR MANAGERS  
ALISON LIM (012) 212 3442  
HEIDEE DATO' HJ AHMAD (019) 388 1880  
GEETHA PERUMAL (016) 250 8640

ACCOUNT MANAGERS  
EDDY MOCHTAR ATA (016) 330 1569  
IAN LEONG (012) 359 1668  
GREGORY THU (012) 376 0614  
NG CHING YIN (012) 232 8035  
SHAFINA SYAHRIR (017) 281 4787  
ANITHA THANALINGAM (016) 340 4083  
HERMAN LIM (019) 276 4911  
PAMELA HOW (016) 223 1143  
JUSTIN CHOY (016) 772 1209  
LIM EE MAE (012) 207 3241

DIGITAL MEDIA  
SHARON LEE (016) 330 1571

## EMAIL

marketing@bizedge.com

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

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## FOREWORD

## Forging on

BY ANNA TAING

It's that time of the year when we take stock of how far Malaysia has come since the victorious cries of "Merdeka!" in 1957. More importantly, it is time to reflect on where this country is heading and whether, as a nation, we have put in a strong enough foundation, both economically and politically, to see through the generations of Malaysians to come.

These are uncertain times and Malaysia, like many other countries, is facing its own set of challenges as it attempts to move to a new growth platform. Sentiment of late has been dampened by a host of issues that include the dark clouds still hanging over the global economy, the current bloodbath in the financial markets, which has re-awakened fears of the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis, and last but not least, the disheartening political and social undercurrents, and the surge in the crime rate at home.

Yet, if we look past the disquiet, Malaysia has its own strengths and opportunities still abound. There are many people who are doing good, and we need more of these stories to come out to help dispel the current negativism.

Johan Mahmood Merican, CEO of Talent Corp Malaysia, encapsulates this ethos when he says: "Like any other nation, Malaysia has its share of issues and challenges. However, sometimes it can be all too easy to be overwhelmed by the sense of negativity pervasive in the conversations among us Malaysians.

"Do we give up and lose faith that Malaysia can and should have a better future? Surely not, when we are a nation of such great potential. Surely not, when the

country has achieved so much since independence. Surely not, when we are only early in our journey of national transformation."

We believe that amid the gloom, there are many companies and individuals who, instead of just complaining about the situation, are trying to make a difference in their own way.

Hence, this special pullout, done in collaboration with TalentCorp, to celebrate the nation's 56th year of independence.

Johan, when he looks around at what is happening today, is reminded of a scene in the film *The Two Towers*, where in a moment of seeming despair, there is an inspiring exchange between Frodo and Sam.

**Frodo:** I can't do this, Sam

**Sam:** I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories. The ones that really mattered... Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something.

**Frodo:** What are we holding on to, Sam?

**Sam:** That there's some good in this world and it's worth fighting for.

So, we hope that as you turn the following pages, the stories of Malaysians — individuals and companies who are finding ways to make a difference for a better Malaysia — will inspire you to keep going and to stay in the fight. To quote Johan: "There is good in Malaysia and it's worth fighting for. We hope you too, believe and will join in the fight."

Merdeka!

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# Excuse me Sir, your Malaysian is showing.

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Because there is nothing as unique as us.

Because we made fusion fashionable, long before it became chic.

Because we find doing things in groups more fun than doing it alone.

Because we like popping wet tissue packs to declare the end of our meals.

Because we like cracking jokes only we get.

Because our style is a bit of this, a pinch of that, and a large dose of everything we love.

Because we can't live without nasi lemak, thosai or chap fun.

Because we believe uttering 'okay', twice in quick succession, is better than saying it once.

Because we have signs in all languages, so no one feels lost, or left out.

Because we made English our own by adding 'lah' to everything.

Because when we follow something foreign, we do it without losing our identity.

Because we know we are wonderfully different. And we wouldn't change our way for the world.

**Selamat Hari Merdeka.**

VIEWS FROM THE TOP

**As we celebrate our 56th year of Merdeka, we ask Malaysia's key corporate leaders to pen down their thoughts on what it takes to build on what we have today so that the future generations too can enjoy robust economic growth and prosperity. The following stories are meant to inspire and, at the same time, spark in our youth the fire that was in the belly of our forefathers who fought for Malaysia's independence more than five decades ago.**

# Take a chance, have a go

AirAsia founder and group CEO Tan Sri Tony Fernandes did not build the airline into a world-class, low-cost carrier by waiting for change to happen. Instead, he defied the odds and broke conventional wisdom. On this Merdeka Day, he shares gems of wisdom with *The Edge* readers on what it takes to make a difference.

**BY ANNA TAING**

***The Edge:* The news flow hasn't been great of late. Some people are disheartened by what has been happening around them. As a corporate leader, how do you see yourself making a difference?**

**Fernandes:** There are two ways of looking at it. You can try to live within the eco-system without getting too affected by what is happening around you or you can try to influence it as much as possible.

When we started out to create the Asean brand, we didn't even know who the Asean secretary general was. We just went on to build the brand. We created an academy, we made every one come, we created an AirAsia AllStar. We did not wait for capacity building, we built our own capacity. We broke conventional wisdom by hiring kids who were carrying bags and store assistants to become pilots and engineers. We did not wait for governments to change the rules on ownership, we created our own model and a multi-country airline.

I feel that sometimes, Malaysians focus too much on the negative, and wait for outside influences to affect their decisions and their own lives. You can make a difference yourself if you are negative about a situation. Make a difference and make a change, don't just talk about it.

We live in a great country but it is far from perfect. There are many things we would like to correct and sometimes, we cannot. But it is better to live in Malaysia than in other parts of the world that are experiencing tons and tons of turmoil. There is a base here, a good quality of life, there is a rule of law and there is

opportunity for a nobody like myself to build an airline that changed Asia.

No one had low-cost carriers [LCCs] before us, we started it. It's a wonderful thing we did but we did it from a country called Malaysia. We broke many myths — we are Malaysian, not bumiputera, Chinese or Indian. We are Malaysians who decided to do something against better wisdom. I could have stayed in London where I had a career but I couldn't have started an airline like AirAsia in the UK, so the opportunity in Malaysia is far greater than in the UK.

Is it fair all the time? Maybe not. But is it fair in England, in America, all the time? There is discrimination everywhere. I can live anywhere in the world but I still choose Asean as my home, I still choose Malaysia as my country of residence.

**In your journey, how did you deal with the hurdles?**

Hurdles are still in my way. You know, AirAsia could be much bigger, but it's not a secret that we have enormous problems with the airports. But we don't give up, we push and we fight. It's tough, that's for sure. I am not here to be Mr Popular. Of course, I would much rather be popular with the GLCs [government-linked companies] and the government but if I did that, we would be dead. Dead!

If you want to make a difference, you have to go against the norm sometimes, and that's why you make a difference. If you had gone with the norm, you wouldn't have made a difference anyway, right?

People in Malaysia sometimes don't like upsetting





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**If you want to make a difference, you have to go against the norm sometimes, and that's why you make a difference. If you had gone with the norm, you wouldn't have made a difference anyway, right?**  
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the equilibrium, but you have to feel you are doing the right thing. You need to ask two questions: One, is it good for my staff and company? Two, is it good for the people of Malaysia? If I said yes to both, then it's my job to keep going.

Let me give you an example, the KL-Singapore route. It took seven years for the 45-minute flight [to take off]. There was this reporter from Bernama who asked, 'Didn't you get tired of fighting for this route? I am tired of writing about it.' (Chuckles). But it's my job, right? I owe it to my staff and I owe it to the people of Malaysia, who had been paying RM800 for a 45-minute flight.

Us Malaysians, we expect everything on a silver platter. I figure the government has spoon-fed too many people. The hard work ethic isn't there but there is no short cut to success. So, I just keep fighting. I saw this in a presentation for the first time myself yesterday [at the inaugural Network Asean Forum in Singapore on Aug 23], which showed that the biggest LCC route in the world is KL-Singapore.

It's tough but I am sure it was also tough for Steve Jobs, who was trying to convince music companies to be on iTunes. It must also have been tough for Bill Gates to get people to use the mouse. I don't mean to put myself in the same category as these CEOs, but I am just saying that if you want to make a difference, you are going to have to upset a few people.

**How much of your own thinking is reflected in AirAsia in terms of nurturing the young, succession planning and building a platform for future generations?**

Talent succession and talent capacity building are key in AirAsia and I am always on the lookout. It's part of my job. Have I done it right? I handed over the CEO post to Aireen [Omar]. I have moved out of the office, given her the space, that's talent development. She is the boss now. I did not have to do that. Ten years as a CEO is nothing in Malaysia, some have been there for 30 to 40 years.

The AirAsia Academy is the most pivotal and single-most important building in AirAsia. It forms the culture, the "one AirAsia-ness", and where kids with dreams may join as check-in assistants but where they might also become pilots one day.

If we are serious about bringing talent back, we also have to create the eco-system to bring back that talent. I still say to the talents overseas, how many places are there in the world where you can achieve what you want and have a good quality of life?

**What is your advice to young people of today?**

This is your life, make your own decisions, take a chance. Life is short, you don't want to reach 55 and say, I wish I had done that. You have one life and you cannot rewind. You want to live your dreams, because dreams can become reality, right? I am one of the world's greatest dreamers, I want to achieve everything, do a lot more than what I have ever, ever dreamt of. I could be hit by a bus tomorrow but, boy, have I lived a great life.

I did not come back because of TalentCorp. I came back because there was a great opportunity for me to succeed here. I had a great life in London and I am as comfortable in London as I am in Malaysia but I will not be who I am if I had remained in London.

Malaysia is more entrepreneurial [compared with Singapore]. We are more "let's take a risk, let's try" kind of people. It depends on what you want in life. If you want a bit of excitement, a bit of challenge, and in my opinion, a much higher quality of life, Malaysia is the place to be.

The grass is always greener somewhere else. In my years here, I have had all kinds of problems — these are well documented but despite that, I love it here. When I see the genuine excitement of kids when they meet me, it's worth it. You have done something good.

For Malaysians coming back, you can help create jobs, and that's a wonderful thing. We [AirAsia] created 10,000 jobs — money can't buy something like that. So, I say to them, come back, give it a chance. If you fail, you fail, you can always go back. If you don't try, you won't know. As I have said, I am a living example of trying, so come back, have a go.



# Teamwork at the heart of everything

BY TAN SRI LIEW KEE SIN

July 4 was a bright sunny morning, and we celebrated the ground-breaking of Battersea Power Station in Central London. Never had I imagined that I would be standing next to the mayor of London and the prime ministers of Malaysia and the UK to commemorate a moment of national significance for both countries.

For Malaysians it was truly a coming of age moment. As our prime minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, so eloquently put it, 60 years ago, few would have predicted that Malaysia could go from being a colony to a cornerstone investor in the UK with the resources to bring one of the country's most iconic landmarks back to life. Listening to his speech, I was filled with quiet pride at how far we have come as a nation, despite the many challenges we still face. I was also reminded that such success is never due to the efforts of an individual but the product of many minds, hands and hearts working together to fulfil a common vision.

The story of Team Setia started simply enough. In 1996, a small intrepid group of largely young men and women took over a listed construction entity. At that time, we only had two development projects — Bukit Indah Ampang and Pusat Bandar Puchong. Both were tremendously successful and we were flying high along with the property boom.

Then, the Asian financial crisis hit. That was our first real test as a management team. S P Setia's share price plunged from a high of RM11.60 in 1997 to 74 sen in 1998. Fortunately, however, the company was in a strong financial position, thanks to the locked-in sales secured pre-crisis.

We made certain key decisions then. First, we would NOT retrench any staff — instead, all executive directors and general managers volunteered to take a 10% pay cut, senior managers took a smaller 3% pay cut while the rest of the staff were spared. In that way, we held together as Team Setia to ride out the storm. The second major decision was to use the money we had to forge ahead with our expansion plans and proceed to develop our first township down south, the 1,433-acre Bukit Indah Johor.

At the very outset, we were determined to create a world-class development. Despite the difficult economic times, we invested upfront in infrastructure and amenities to improve connectivity and enhance our residents' quality of life. Actual units were kept small during the crisis years to keep prices affordable. Our team's hard work and responsiveness to market demands paid off — sales were strong and our stellar performance in Johor enabled us to return in a big way to the Klang Valley in 2002 when we acquired the 4,000-acre North Hummock Estate in Shah Alam.

In less than 10 years since its first launch, this former landlocked plantation has been totally transformed. Setia Alam and Setia Eco Park now exemplify our Live-LearnWorkPlay development philosophy, with thriving communities, a vibrant commercial hub, a world-class mall, local, private and international schools as well as ample recreational amenities — all of which have greatly improved the lives and livelihood of residents and visitors alike.

From townships, we then ventured into integrated commercial developments, luxury high-rises, green business parks and expanded to Penang and East Malaysia.

This solid Malaysian foundation and our strong customer following painstakingly earned over the years paved the way for the group's international ventures. Today, we are present in seven countries — Malaysia, Vietnam, Australia, Singapore, China, Indonesia and the UK.

All our overseas investments and projects have made one thing very clear to me — Malaysia has no shortage of talent and if we work as a team, we can take on the best in the world and win!

When we embarked on Fulton Lane, our first project in Melbourne, we were advised that at best, we could sell 20 to 30 units over a weekend preview. We decided to take on the challenge of marketing the project ourselves — our entire marketing team from Penang, the Klang Valley and Johor Baru personally invited and attended to their own high-net-worth customers. As a result, 70% of our first tower, which comprises 299 units, was booked over a single weekend.

This phenomenon was repeated on a much larger scale with Battersea Power Station this year. During the groundbreaking ceremony in July, exactly one year after we bought the site, not only did we successfully launch the project but we also sold over 97% of Phase 1, with a total sales value of £685 million. This was a feat never before achieved in London and I am proud to say that Team Setia played a huge role in securing this success.

## OUR TALENT DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

Get the best person for the job, challenge them to be the best, hold them accountable for results and work as a team to get things done. No one person knows or is good at everything. At S P Setia, teamwork is at the heart of all we do — with a strong team, we can maximise our collective strengths and compensate for individual weaknesses. We believe firmly in meritocracy and in recognising our people when they do well, with a detailed performance management and appraisal system that rewards each staff based on both individual achievements and group results.

Another area we invest heavily in is training. Our Setia Learning Academy offers a wide range of courses cus-

tom-designed to groom, motivate, train and improve our people's knowledge and technical, supervisory, management and leadership skills. We also strongly believe in giving exposure to staff at all levels to learn and be challenged. Each time we win an international award or at every major launch of an international project, we bring along high-performing staff who have contributed towards that particular achievement to share in the celebration. These trips also serve as detailed study tours to inspire and challenge them to adapt the best ideas from all over the world for their own projects. Over the years, many of our marketing, technical and support service staff have benefited from such trips and they have been the source of some of our greatest innovations.

As leaders, we must always work to keep staff engaged and morale high. For this to happen, they must feel that they have a strong stake in the company's success and continued hope that their future with us is very bright. Communication is key and we have many avenues for this to take place — from daily "Good Morning Setia" meetings to regular Marketing, Quality and Support Service forums and half-yearly CEO Dialogues, there are numerous opportunities for the staff to hear from their leaders and share with us how things can be improved.

In 2011, we received our most gratifying award — Overall Best Employer in Malaysia and one of the Best Employers in Asia-Pacific — by AON Hewitt. We retained this top spot in 2013, being ranked the "Best of the Best" among top employers in Malaysia. Of all the awards we have won, this one is closest to my heart as it comes from our own people.

On the occasion of this 56th Merdeka celebration, I would like to pay tribute to Team Setia, which has stood by me every step of the way and wholeheartedly given their talents, energies and abilities to transform S P Setia Bhd from a small property player into the global champion that it is today. I would also like to acknowledge that there are many other Malaysian success stories out there. I hope that with this article, my fellow CEOs who have done well will take the opportunity to share and impart their experiences to inspire and motivate a new generation to take the country to greater heights!

Selamat Hari Merdeka! E

Tan Sri Liew Kee Sin is president and CEO of S P Setia Bhd

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Get the best person for the job, challenge them to be the best, hold them accountable for results and work as a team to get things done. No one person knows or is good at everything.”





# Build our youth for the future

BY TENGKU DATUK ZAFRUL AZIZ

What makes a nation? It's the people. And we Malaysians can be proud of our contributions to the success of this country. We work hard to play our part and enjoy the fruits of our labour — a growing economy, a peaceful nation and a multicultural haven. Sometimes though, we get a little lost in the rat race and forget that we will not be around forever. When we are gone, who will take over?

Which is why I believe strongly in nurturing young talent. They are the leaders of the future. It is sometimes too easy to be dismissive of the youth. We think of them as too young to know anything, too naïve to understand, too playful to be taken seriously and the list just goes on.

My involvement with Enactus, a non-profit organisation that works closely with the youth, has opened my eyes to the potential of Malaysian youngsters. (Student leaders at Enactus are guided by academic advisers and business leaders to create and implement community empowerment projects. This experience not only transforms lives, it helps students develop the kind of talent and perspective essential to leadership in a challenging world).

Enactus engages university students in entrepreneurial pursuits that require the students to run their own business ventures while contributing and giving back

to society in a long-term and sustainable manner.

This took a lot of thinking, creativity, intelligence and sometimes muscle power, and I am happy to say that what they all came up with were brilliant. They showed drive and commitment, and a genuine concern for the communities they were helping.

Enactus, and the ideas produced by the youth, have made me rethink my take on the young people of today. I admit that I have sometimes been guilty of thinking of my young fellow citizens as being lazy, spoon-fed, too dependent on their elders and so on, but I am glad to be proven wrong. The youths I have met more recently have all shown themselves to be upstanding Malaysians and we should all commend them for their drive and initiative.

The government is doing its part in nurturing our young talents with many programmes and so are many Malaysian corporates. Maybank, for example, does its part with its corporate social responsibility activities and also by sponsoring youth-related organisations and causes, including Enactus.

I would like to tell the youth out there to go for what they want, to strive for success, to work hard to make our country and the world a better place. It's not all about making money; we also have a responsibility to society and to the environment.

Remember, it's not all about the material things; sometimes, it's the little things you do that count and which can make a whole lot of difference to the world. Yes, you may be just one person, but you matter.

Am I full of hope for the youth of this nation? Yes, I am, because I have seen wonderful examples of the youth banding together to do good. We sometimes may not understand how they work, but I believe that there is a reason behind what we may perceive as "madness".

Instead of shutting down their ways of doing things, which we perceive as not conforming to our way of thinking, perhaps we can accept that there is more than one way of getting things done. After all, I'm sure we had to put up with some stodgy thinking in our younger days!

I have two children of my own and although they're still very young, I'd like to think that I am helping them to come into their own and be contributing members of society when they grow up.

Being a parent has made me realise that a great responsibility comes with having children, and helping them to be the best that they can be is about all that we can do. We love them, we nurture them, we educate them, we give them direction, we instil discipline... and the rest is really up to them.

It amazes me each day how these little people of mine have such strong wills of their own and such distinct personalities. I love seeing them assert themselves — whether it's my daughter arguing with me over a point in a conversation or my one-plus-year-old son insisting on choosing his own outfit even if it is mismatched. It makes me proud to see that they are standing up for what they want and expressing their opinions.

That's what we want in our youth, people who think for themselves. Brilliant individuals who are not afraid to stand up for what they believe in, and go for what they want.

I came across a quote by Franklin D Roosevelt that I love and which I think is apt: "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."

As we celebrate our 56th year of Merdeka, I am thankful for all that we have achieved as a nation. Not many other countries can boast the steady growth and development that we have experienced thus far, and I hope that we will continue to see our beloved Malaysia flourish. Merdeka! **E**

Tengku Datuk Zafrul Aziz is CEO of Maybank Investment Bank



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# The highest ROI of all

BY TAN SRI AZMAN MOKHTAR

At least once a year, we ask ourselves what Merdeka truly means. We know of many answers, but most, if not all, will simply centre around the same timeless aspirations as to what freedom and independence mean to us as individuals, as members of our family units, as a part of the organisations that we belong to, and collectively, as citizens of a proud, independent and sometimes fractious nation. In the end, we are all not very different; everyone wants to be the best that we can be. And in case we can't, we certainly want our children to be better than we are, just as our parents aspired and toiled in the same way for us.

An individual's life cycle has many parallels to that of a nation's development cycle. Good, clean values applied in a diligent, just and determined manner is the best — some say the only — guarantee of lasting success in this world and indeed the next. That applies to our individual selves and that applies to us collectively as a nation. Indeed, many individuals and many nations have fallen by the wayside from the resource curse of having a surfeit of natural resources, but only matched by a grave deficit of human resources and values. We know that the reverse also applies in that many nations and individuals alike, with little or no natural or financial resources, through diligence, honesty and talent, have succeeded in going from rags to riches.

Our holy books and philosophers alike have noted that while everything in the natural and physical world follows a well-defined order of things, of cause and effect, it is only man that has been granted choice and free will. This is both our boon and our bane. Precisely that which allows us to occasionally soar higher than even the angels unfortunately too often also makes us capable of falling lower than the lowest. Simply restated, it is we, as humans, who have the greatest variability of outcomes and indeed the greatest scope for determining the most different outcomes. It is therefore quite obvious but nonetheless worth repeating that when properly applied, the highest return on investment is most certainly obtained when one invests in people.

It was this same fundamental belief that drove us at Khazanah in 2004 to define human capital development as not just an important enabler for us to undertake our core investment work, but more so, as a strategic target in itself. In short, we saw talent and leadership development not just as a means, but very much as an end in itself. Indeed, as I reflect on what we have achieved over the last nine years of our transformation programme, while we are proud and thankful that in that period, we have managed to treble the net worth of our portfolio to cross RM100 billion, what is undoubtedly more important is the ability to develop leaders and talent at Khazanah as well as the GLCs [government-linked companies] and entities that we are tasked with leading. This remains the best leading indicator of whether we will truly succeed or not, as only with this success will we be able to secure and sustain whatever we have been able to achieve to date.

It is in this context that in addition to the work on developing internal talent, we focused on multiple GLC and nationwide programmes over the years with the overarching objective of nurturing human capital. This includes, inter alia, the Blue Book (driving performance-based culture at GLCs, 2005), Orange Book (leadership development, 2006), MINDA (Malaysian Directors Academy, 2006), Yayasan Khazanah scholarships (from 2006), Yayasan PIN-TAR and Yayasan AMIR (GLC school adoption and Trust Schools Public Private Partnership programmes), MyWorkLife and GEMS and GREEN programmes (targeting émigré talent to return and rehabilitating unemployed graduates — now transferred to TalentCorp) and Cross Assignment and Cross Fertilisation Programmes between GLCs and between GLCs and the government. The focus on education was not coincidental and indeed, our work continues to be much centred on this, including through the universities in our group such as UNITEN [Universiti Tenaga Nasional] and MMU

[Multimedia University], in the Educity at Iskandar, in supporting education-based NGOs such as Teach for Malaysia, and in investing in knowledge management, including our own think tank the Khazanah Research Institute (KRIS).

With a view to building access and cross-fertilisation to develop the Khazanah and indeed national talent pool, we have also established over the years linkages with and access to various centres of learning excellence, including the Mason Programme at Harvard University, the Sloan Programme at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Khazanah-OCIS Merdeka Scholarship Programme at Oxford University and the Khazanah Cambridge Scholarship Programme at Cambridge University. Considering that Khazanah only has about 400 professional staff, we are particularly thankful that we have been able to produce many participants at these programmes and several recipients of prestigious international awards for programmes such as the Eisenhower Fellowship and the Young Global Leaders and Global Shapers of the World Economic Forum. We are also particularly heartened by the progress of our existing staff and our alumni who have now begun to not only fill up senior positions in

local and international firms as CEOs and other CXOs, but also in a myriad other fields — as business and social entrepreneurs, NGO and social activists and even as writers and authors, among others.

Nonetheless, there is much more to do and indeed, the journey of developing talent and leaders has only just started. How far we go on this journey will truly determine whether Khazanah and our GLCs will be able to succeed not just in its current task but indeed as the best leading indicator of whether we will be able to cement and indeed grow whatever gains that we have made.

As nations go, 56 is still a very young age. On this Merdeka day, we must renew our resolve to continue developing our people to be the best that they can be, and in the process, contribute to both nation building in itself and in growing the timber for the future generations of leaders. Let's do this at our respective individual levels, in our respective organisations and more so, let's do this together — collectively as a free, proud and ambitious nation. Insha'Allah.

MERDEKA!

Tan Sri Azman Mokhtar is MD of Khazanah Nasional Bhd



**On this Merdeka day, we must renew our resolve to continue developing our people to be the best that they can be and in the process, contribute to both nation building in itself and in growing the timber for the future generations of leaders. Let's do this at our respective individual levels, in our respective organisations and more so, let's do this together — collectively as a free, proud and ambitious nation. Insha'Allah.**





**COURAGE**



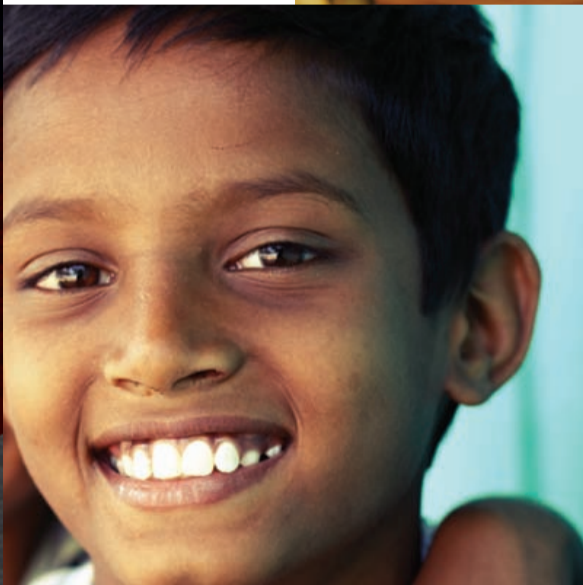
**SOVEREIGNTY**



**INTEGRITY**



**UNITY**



**Red. Yellow. White. Blue.**

**These are the colours of the Jalur Gemilang.**

Just like Malaysia with its diverse cultural tapestries.  
Let us celebrate the colourful diversity  
that has painted Malaysia for 56 years.

**Selamat Hari Merdeka**

from  
**Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad**

## CHANGEMAKERS

# Change for progress,

This Merdeka, *The Edge* speaks with several remarkable individuals who exemplify the quote at right. Amid Malaysia's landscape, they have identified critical issues they are passionate about addressing, and have opted to do so because they can. Their efforts prove that youth, inexperience or a lack of financing are not obstacles to translating their beliefs into action. From community outreach projects to environmental initiatives, they share with us why they've embarked on their respective projects to improve the well-being of society.

ALL STORIES BY EMILY CHOW

**GOH SZE YING,  
#BETTERCITIES**

According to Goh Sze Ying, 30, changes can and should be made from the bottom up, that is, from the grassroots level. Hence, she and a colleague created an urban campaign called #BetterCities in her capacity as community & partnerships lead at Popdigital, a multi-platform creative outfit.

"It started with the knowledge that people complain about [living in] Kuala Lumpur, but it ends there without any proactive action [taken] to change things," Goh describes the movement that she started in late 2011.

"When I joined Popdigital, we wanted to work on projects in KL's public spaces. The idea was to contribute to the liveability of the city but from an entirely different approach," she says. "Instead of relying so much on the government and urban planners, can we do something about it ourselves?"

#BetterCities was then conceptualised to improve the liveability of cities in the region by addressing urban problems. "Cities in Southeast Asia share quite similar statuses in terms of mobility and urban planning, so the idea is to have the initiative grow organically and be adopted by different cities," Goh explains.

The idea has since been initiated in Singapore by a group of architects under the label #BetterSG, while the local campaign is known as #BetterKL. The movements examine liveability metrics and create projects to improve standards while exploring issues of urban activism.

"While we can't tackle big issues such as how the city is planned, we can address issues of mobility such as why buses [in Malaysia] run late," she continues. "To highlight the issue, we started a project called While We Wait, which introduces community interaction to address idle time while waiting."

Initiatives of While We Wait include graphic installations to initiate conversations about shared spaces and leaving behind seed bombs (seeds set in dried clay and compost) to encourage the planting of trees.

#BetterCities has also collaborated with architecture students of Taylor's College to improve the conditions of several existing bus stops. Earlier this year, a project called Urban Residency was launched to focus on abandoned spaces. It successfully turned a back alley in Little India, Penang, into a courtyard for the residents in the area. "The average Malaysian's idea of free time is to spend it in a mall. While we can lament about the lack of parks around, our project in Penang identifies [the problem]," Goh says, adding that the project entailed cooperation from parties such as Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang, a heritage group and several architects.

"In the long term, we're looking to expand on projects similar to Urban Residency. The Penang project is the strongest representation of our team's philosophy of collaborative, bottom-up urbanism. It was done by young architects and we worked closely with authorities... so that's the model we aim for in our future projects.

"This shapes the urban landscape from the user's point of view," she continues. "We're trying to drive home the point that a city should be designed by its users, and not just selected people of specific skills, knowledge and expertise."

Ultimately, Goh wants people to realise that they can introduce positive changes instead of just complaining. "It's the idea of usability, not on a large macro scale of the city but for people to take ownership of their common spaces, their neighbourhood, workplace or school," she says.

"Ask yourself what you want from it and what you can do with it. Improvements don't require huge budgets. It can start small and the ripple can be very big. That's a point I really believe in."

“Improvements don't require huge budgets. It can start small and the ripple can be very big. > GOH

**AZAM HISHAM, BIJI-BIJI INITIATIVE**

Azam Hisham, 26, and his friends spend much of their time chasing ideals. Like many young Malaysians, their conversations revolve around ideas for a progressive society, and they have strong convictions in the collective strength of a community. Over time, the group of four wanted to realise a vision of engaging with society through exchanges of ideas.

"The concept was to inspire people to create instead of waste, and to be more idealistic," says Azam. "It was always about the community for us, and if we're able to, why not try to leave an impact on people in any way that we can?"

In January, the group formed Biji-biji Initiative, a social enterprise that produces marketable products from used material that would otherwise be headed to the landfills. "Biji-biji started out as a completely different idea, and [went through] lots of pivots from one thing to another. It was initially a much bigger idea," recalls Azam. "We wanted to have a village that produced its own food and energy, before scaling it to a more realistic setting to something we could afford to do at hand."

The initiative didn't require any monetary investments in its initial stages; the four used social media to obtain unwanted materials from the public and worked on turning them into usable products in ad hoc spaces. Later projects, however, required funds, which Biji-biji obtained through the Arthur Guinness Fund, which financially assists social enterprises.

Biji-biji's ongoing projects include amassing a tool collection to establish an open-source workshop, creating a platform called "Donate Your Idea" for sharing ideas, and making door gifts for company events from recyclable materials. The team has turned old floor coverings into seed incubators and bunting into multi-purpose bags. The bags can then be turned into a vertical garden at the end of their lifespan.

"We like the idea of open-source platforms, ideas from there can be applied to underprivileged communities," explains Azam. "We initiated a foundation for the learning disabled to produce our bags, so it's an inclusive method of production where you're helping a community become self-sustaining. The materials are also hugely problematic waste products that you can address via a simple application of ideas. It's a niche with more value that we offer from otherwise mass-produced corporate gifts."

What essentially drives this initiative forward, concludes Azam, is a love for collaboration in problem solving. "The name 'Biji-biji' means 'seeds', and our passion is to nurture creative ideas in society more than the projects were doing now. Malaysia as a whole is lacking in so many simple solutions so we wanted to endorse that. If everyone got their hands dirty together and shared ideas, it would amount to a lot of good things," he says. "Many people in this day and age are trying to make it by finding that one gem of an idea to become the next Mark Zuckerberg, but in that pursuit, people often forget that working collaboratively amounts to a bigger effect.

"So, we want to practise that, donate ideas to help marginalised communities and hope people will be less guarded with their ideas. Ideas are more likely to be executed when people are aware of the potential in collaborating."

“Our passion is to nurture creative ideas in society... If everyone got their hands dirty together and shared ideas, it would amount to a lot of good things >AZAM

**ONG GUAN SIN,  
MARI KITA MEMBACA**

The saying "knowledge is power" holds true for the founders of Mari Kita Membaca (MKM), which stemmed from one woman's gesture of gratitude. It has since turned into a larger initiative to empower children of indigenous villages (orang asli and orang asal) through reading.

The MKM project began in 2010 with Rusalina Idrus, then a researcher with the National University of Singapore (NUS) who had conducted research in Sabah. As a way of thanking the Sabahan villagers who had hosted her, Rusalina donated some books to their community learning centre. She began sending more books to various other villages she had spent time at and eventually decided to rope in more volunteers to turn it into an ongoing project.

Geared to indirectly address social ills in these indigenous villages, the project would curb school dropout at an early stage by encouraging the reading habit. Thus, MKM donated books to primary and early secondary school students.

While most of the volunteers are in their 20s and comprise students, young professionals and academics, founding member and core volunteer Ong Guan Sin is 42. The former colleague of Rusalina at NUS now focuses on the local communities in Segamat, Johor.

"The idea is for volunteers to go back to the underserved communities, preferably their hometowns, and help [the communities there]. We've worked with 30 villages or local learn-





# progress for change

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

> MARGARET MEAD, ANTHROPOLOGIST



## WONG POH YI, GLOBAL SHAPERS KUALA LUMPUR

The first step towards creating a better Malaysia, opines Wong Poh Yi, 28, is being in the country. You can't contribute if you're not physically here, she says. Although she had received a job offer in the US after completing her tertiary education, Wong returned to join Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in Malaysia as a consultant. "Working with government agencies and ministries is my area of passion, so I chose to do a lot of public sector work at BCG," Wong says

Wong's contribution to serve the community doesn't end there. Outside of work, she is a youth leader under the Global Shapers Kuala Lumpur Hub, a movement she founded with three others in 2012. An initiative by the World Economic Forum, Global Shapers is a network of 226 hubs in cities across the world. Members are youth leaders, or shapers, who organise annual projects to give back to the community based on where their interests lie.

"I heard about Global Shapers from my boss, as BCG is a global partner of the World Economic Forum," says Wong, who was attracted to the organisation for its local community contributions and international network exposure. "Projects are very city-based as our work and initiatives should impact our local communities. Yet, we're part of a larger, international community where you learn so much more when exposed to what other fellow shapers are doing."

For their first project, the founding members of Global Shapers Kuala Lumpur Hub decided to launch an initiative to increase graduate employability. Titled "My First Job", the programme would help students or unemployed fresh local graduates to increase their employability through three phases over the course of a year. "We saw a big problem there, and many of us had just crossed the road [of securing jobs] ourselves," says Wong. "We wanted to give back in that sense, as many people had helped us in our respective job searches."

“Often times, we act out of self-interest, but if we start thinking from the perspective of nation building, it's not about yourself anymore. Hopefully one day, more Malaysians will think about what else they can do for their country.”

WONG



online for future reference at <http://myfirstjob.globalshapers.org.my/>.

Global Shapers Kuala Lumpur has since increased its membership to 20 shapers and has two projects in the pipeline for the coming year. One aims to beautify public spaces through art and the other will encourage organisations to reduce their carbon footprint. "The heartbeat of Global Shapers is to develop young leaders who will give back to society and step up to the call of leadership in society when the opportunity presents itself," says Wong. "Often times, we act out of self-interest, but if we start thinking from the perspective of nation building, it's not about yourself anymore. Hopefully one day, more Malaysians will think about what else they can do for their country." ■

## LIM SU ANN, MALAYSIA FORUM

In 2003, a group of Malaysian students in the San Francisco Bay Area attended a talk given by a Malaysian. They had a simple get-together to discuss the subject further and upon realising the necessity of dialogue, birthed the idea of Malaysia Forum (MF), a neutral platform for students to discuss affairs pertaining to civil society in Malaysia while serving as a space to exchange ideas.

"They weren't getting enough out of the organised event, and wanted to do something about it as the forums [then] weren't providing the quality of discussions they wanted," says Lim Su Ann, 24, of the initial group of students. "They then blew up the conversation into a more organised form and MF was born."

The popularity of the forum gained traction and in 2007, shifted to the Northeastern region of the US, where a significant number of Malaysian students reside. The forums are held in different campuses every year, featuring Malaysian speakers (via webcast) discussing a particular theme. After the conference, forum attendees are split into small groups for discourse. MF chapters have sprung up in cities worldwide — Singapore, Sydney, London and Paris — to cater for Malaysians.

Lim has been on the organising team of MF since her freshman year at Columbia University in 2008. The thrust of MF spoke to her, and she hopped on board immediately.

"There's a space that hasn't really been addressed when it comes to civil discussion, and while there are forums and conferences [for Malaysian students abroad], very few organisations have that spirit of discussion at heart," she explains. "Having a sense of ownership of Malaysian issues is very important to me; when you're abroad, there's suddenly a vacuum of things that I care about, so for my own personal reasons, I wanted to fill that gap."

"But in a less personal sense, MF provides direct access to young, bright, hungry minds, and bringing them into this space encourages everyone to talk and share ideas," she continues. "At the end of the day, the value is in bringing people together. We need to remind ourselves that a bunch of Malaysians together can be very, very powerful."

Today, MF draws a crowd of about 300 students in live participation across the world, a number much larger than the organisers intended it to be. The speakers' conference is also available for online viewing through live streaming, where individuals ranging from politicians to company CEOs and thinkers have been hosted.

Despite the availability of its conference online and its high-profile speakers, the beauty of MF, according to Lim, is in the discussions that take place between small groups.

"It's easy to get carried away with big name speakers, but we want different voices [of diverse opinions], as small conversations are what's powerful," she says. "It helps us become more critical in our conversations and the perspective we choose to have. Everyone there is clueless and vulnerable, but that's where the best conversations happen. What would make a better Malaysia is when everyone realises the impact they have when they come together with like-minded people, and when you try to do things together." ■

“What would make a better Malaysia is when everyone realises the impact they have when they come together with like-minded people, and when you try to do things together.”

LIM



ing centres over the last three years," he says. "We don't have a physical presence in these villages, so we rely on the local organisations that do. We're mainly focusing on Peninsular Malaysia now."

MKM has visited communities in Seremban, Perak and Kelantan, providing them with "a library in a box" containing over 100 books each. Being on the ground with the local communities presents more opportunities to discover what their real needs are, Ong says. Five thousand books have been sent out so far, with funds coming from donation drives and contributions from regular donors.

"I'm a marathon runner, so I raise funds when I run," says Ong. "But that's the easy part; the hard part is running activities to encourage reading among the kids, which we do through storytelling sessions. The kids are generally receptive; they play games and tell us stories too."

Ong hopes that MKM will inspire others to do simple things within their capacity to make a positive change. "This idea isn't difficult. If everyone helps one or two communities, we can make a difference," he opines. "[When we emphasise] the importance of reading to young kids, this will make a difference to society in the longer term."

"We have so many books at home and we understand the universal value of reading, but we don't think about how these books can help others," he continues. "This is a society of extremes, so we try to soften it by reaching out to others. We do what we think makes a good impact, and other people will [follow suit and] play their part." ■

“This is a society of extremes, so we try to soften it by reaching out to others. We do what we think makes a good impact, and other people will [follow suit and] play their part.”

ONG



## ORGANISATIONS &amp; INITIATIVES

Many Malaysian entities – in both the corporate and social realms – are doing more to help build a better future for this country. Some started with small initiatives while others were more ambitious. In the following pages, we talk to a slew of these companies – from multinational corporations such as Agilent Technologies to lesser-known not-for-profit organisations such as MyHarapan. Big or small, all of them have something in common – in their own way, they are making a difference.

## NI Malaysia: Developing young engineers

Some may bemoan the perceived limited environment in Malaysia. They may also frequently extol the virtues of the level playing field and seemingly boundless opportunities found in the West. Are they correct? Specifically, is there a sizeable gap between the opportunities that are available to the youths in the East and those in the West? Is one group at a disadvantage and thus unable to compete in the global market?

Ask Yong Kit Chin. After having lived overseas for 37 years and reached the top echelons of the demanding, rapidly changing tech industry, Penang-born Kit Yong (as he is called) is able to draw a comparison based on his world view and personal experience. He returned to Malaysia last year to head the research and development centre for National Instruments Corp (NI). His main task is to hire and develop young Malaysian engineers. This is a critical role for Yong, who is also director of R&D engineering for NI Malaysia Sdn Bhd, as human capital has long been recognised as the most important success factor for highly competitive global tech companies.

"I find the outlook and attitude of young engineers in the East and West to be similar. The world is getting smaller. With the Internet, information is easily available and they can all learn about new products and read about events as they happen. So, there aren't any marked differences in their approach towards working life," says Yong, 57.

Their book knowledge is also on par. A notable difference, he says, is in their working experience. His team in Malaysia is very young, compared to their peers in the US and Europe. "They are very energetic, as you would expect. Now they need to learn how to work as an engineer in a global company. They need working experience. Many also need to work on their communication skills. Poor command of English makes it more difficult.

"Now, I spend quite a bit of time editing reports before they are published [within the company] and guiding the engineers in how to get their points across. Having the technical skills is only one part of the story, you must be able to communicate your ideas to your colleagues around the world to get their buy-in and support."

Another difference that he has observed is that in Malaysia, it is harder to find engineers with "deep" experience – 30 to 40 years of working experience. This could be because they move on to other professions such as sales or management. "If you were to compare with Japan, it is not uncommon to find a CEO of a company who has been working as an engineer for 40 to 50 years," observes Yong.

These teething problems of a young emerging economy can be overcome. He believes he is on track in establishing the second largest R&D centre for NI in Malaysia and will eventually oversee the transfer of projects from its headquarters in Austin, Texas, to Penang. Established in 1976, NI has offices in more than 40 countries and about 6,850 employees.

Thus, concluding that the situation is better in the West is incorrect. Yong sees more career opportunities for young adults in emerging economies such as Malaysia as compared with developed nations. It is also just as difficult for someone from a low economic strata or from a minority race to succeed in the seemingly more open, developed countries.

"There are more new industries and new businesses setting up in Malaysia. So, the young adults have a choice [in picking their careers]. They will not be stuck if they are willing to work hard. Of course, on a national level, government policies can improve to be more effective in enabling more of the young to reach their full potential. This is true for any country," says Yong.

There is, however, a unique characteristic in a commercially well-developed country such as the US. This is the cultivation of blue ocean industries – businesses

created from an innovative business idea or product. Since they are brand new to consumers, these companies create their own market. Examples include Cirque du Soleil and the iPod.

Innovative thinking is the driving force behind blue-ocean industries and it is seen as a competitive advantage for any company, industry and country. Governments around the world have established policies and programmes that nurture creative, out-of-the-box and innovative thinking.

Innovate Malaysia Design Competition is an example of an event that aims to build the country's future competitiveness on the back of innovative and creative thinking. The event, supported by Talent Corp Malaysia Bhd and Multimedia Development Corp, is targeted at university students in the engineering and computer science fields. The winning team, from University Sains Malaysia, built an oil palm fruit-ripeness detection kit using NI's industrial platform.

"Events like Innovate Malaysia's design competition are a step in the right direction towards fostering creative and critical thinking and innovation. Yet, more can be done," says Yong. "This event targets university students. What about students of a younger age? In the US, creative thinking is encouraged among children. For example, the education system there includes project work at a very early age and this contributes to the final grade that a student earns. It is not to say that the education system here is bad. Still, it can be structured to encourage and reward innovative thinking at a very young age. This builds a culture and an innovative mindset among the young."

Lego Mindstorm robots built using a platform from NI is an example of a product that encourages children of all ages to think systematically and creatively to solve problems. Using Lego's snap-together toy blocks and a robotic software, young innovators can build their first robots while practising engineering and mathematical ideas. Teachers in the US are already using these robots as part of their teaching curriculum.

What about those who have already entered the workforce? Yong's advice is to look for mentors, one that can provide feedback and guidance on how to move forward. "I have had many mentors throughout my career, even in university [he secured a scholarship from Columbia University in New York when he was 18]. I was not from a wealthy family and I knew I had to work hard. No matter how smart you think you are, you always need guidance. So, actively look for mentors – those who have done what you want to do – and seek their guidance," he says.

This is the role that he is playing in NI Malaysia and his plans are to build a research centre of 300 engineers. NI recruits Malaysians across the country and although it is fairly new – operations started in 2009 – it has already developed a reputation as a notable employer among university students. "We work hard and play hard at NI. This is reflected in our policies. Our office uses an open-seating arrangement and there is a very flat organisation structure. Our interns who come from all over Malaysia are attached to a good senior engineer and given actual projects to work on. They have to present their results to senior management. We also arrange for social outings to encourage them to play hard. We may take them to the beach and arrange social events. I think university students like what we offer and there is an increasing number of applications for internships with us every year," says Yong.

— **By Elaine Boey**

There are more new industries and new businesses setting up in Malaysia. So, the young adults have a choice [in picking their careers]. They will not be stuck if they are willing to work hard.

> YONG

## McKinsey & Co: One starfish at a time

A bunch of McKinsey consultants were sitting around and chatting late on a Friday afternoon some six years ago. The talk turned to things they could do as a group to make a difference to the country. Ideas were thrown around on different areas such as health, climate change and people. Pretty quickly, the group gravitated towards the idea of talent development and education.

McKinsey & Co senior partner Seelan Singham remembers it like it was yesterday. "There was just an incredible amount of energy in the room. Most of them wanted to make a difference through education and talent development of youth because, I think, they felt so privileged to have had their education and opportunities."

So it was decided. They would focus on helping educate and develop leaders. But that was where it ended. They were not quite sure how they would go about doing it. The problem, if one could call it that, seemed quite overwhelming.

Six months later, a 23-year-old consultant walked into Seelan's office and told him how: "Let me tell you something about Suyin [the young consultant who initiated the actual programme] to help you understand this. She came from one of the rougher high schools but through hard work, she did well and eventually won a scholarship to Cambridge University in the UK. That's where we found her and recruited her."

So, when she walked into Seelan's office later and declared that something had to be done for youths who didn't have the same opportunities, he listened. And it was she who came up with the idea of a Youth Leadership Academy (YLA).

The concept? To accelerate the development of top Malaysians in Malaysian universities.

The programme has run for about five years and some 171 (including 51 in the present class) youths have passed through it, explains Seelan. The young people are mentored by Malaysian leaders from different walks of life (corporates, government servants and NGOs) who take time off from their very heavy schedules to be part of this.

Only the best of the best in local universities qualify. "Typically, about 200 of the best Malaysian students apply and only 30 get in," says Seelan.

Second, it's not classroom-based. "They need to generate a social entrepreneurship project and then work together on it."

The third piece of the puzzle is the access granted to McKinsey's training and leadership materials. "We take it and craft it and it's delivered by our own consultants," Seelan adds.

And then, there are the mentors. "We have two types of mentors – people from within McKinsey and also leaders from outside. The mentors coach this highly talented group of youngsters and personally dedicate time for them."

And the final piece is the speakers that the YLA brings in to talk to these students. "We've had Tan Sri Az-





“Trying to make a difference to Malaysia can be overwhelming but if you can just pick an area and start, one starfish at a time, you're off. And it builds and builds.” >SEELAN

## PwC: Helping grads prepare for work

Mona Shafini Omar, PwC's head of resourcing, is one of TalentCorp's "YouTube" stars. In the Ready4Work videos, which are designed to help graduates with what to include in their résumés and how to approach job interviews, she comes across as bright, engaging and articulate.

"Other companies have contributed to Ready4Work and I think my [PwC's] main contribution was to be in that video," she says with a laugh. "I was in the video basically to help students brush up on their résumé-writing and interviewing skills."

Ready4Work, basically the go-to portal for Malaysian undergraduates and graduates who are prepping for the job market, provides tips on how to build résumés, prepare for interviews, set goals and improve oneself.

It is a collaboration between TalentCorp, MyLinE (an online resource for learning in English) and other top corporations such as Telekom Malaysia, CIMB Group, Axiata, Accenture Malaysia, Maybank, Intel, Motorola Solutions, Ernst & Young and Maxis.

Mona has been on the graduate recruiting scene for about eight years. A UK graduate and a returnee, she agrees with Professor Sharifah Habsah of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), who said it was not enough for companies to complain that local graduates are not of the quality they were looking for; they have to do their part in making these graduates employable.

"You can't expect universities to prepare graduates for the working world and maybe, that's not their job anyway. So, employers do their part and this [Ready4Work] is one of the ways we do it. And we're also working with other companies on a boot camp to give graduates exposure to the jobs out there. And we also run a series of exercises and games to equip them with the sort of skills that foreign graduates have," she says.

Each company is given 2½ hours with the graduates. PwC fills this time with games and activities that reflect its corporate values. "We get them to think about teamwork, building their personal brand and safeguarding their reputation on social media."

But these are not the only programmes PwC is involved in. "There are a lot of things we do for graduates. We do a programme with TAR College, where we teach them soft skills, which is limited to a certain number of students and we have eight modules to help equip them for the real world after graduation. Then, of course, you have the grooming workshops, interview skills workshops, communications skills ... so we work with them throughout."

How did PwC come up with these programmes and why does Mona think they are necessary? "We started doing it because you do tend to get frustrated at the quality of graduates that sometimes come through to you during interviews. Nowadays, too, they don't need you to come and talk about the company. If you want to engage them, you need to offer them something they are looking for, as well."

The graduates, Mona adds, are very hungry for guidance. "They like the mentoring relationship and the interaction with senior management and business leaders."

The question she is frequently asked is whether PwC prefers foreign graduates. "It's simply not true. In fact, I do go the extra mile for our local graduates and at PwC, we fight very hard for diversity and inclusion, which is why I like working here."

Diversity is not simply a matter of gender, but ethnicity, age and whether you're a local or foreign graduate. "And it's nice to see the people you fought for get into the organisation."

Mona tries to do her bit on a personal level as well. Take a recent student event where the top multinational companies came to-

gether to talk to the candidates, in effect, getting the students to consider putting in their CVs. There's a war for talent out there and although on the surface, things are kept civil, underneath it's usually a different matter.

"Normally, we fight like mad and try our level best to outdo each other at these types of events. This time around, I called the other employers and said, 'Guys, let's stop being silly about it. Why don't we rejig the format and do a presentation together? Let's not think about our KPIs [key performance indicators] and profits and who got the better candidates. This time around, let's just go in and do something that benefits them.'" And they all responded positively to the suggestion, which was a huge improvement over the usual free-for-all fights.

Mona was simply being realistic: "In Malaysia, people move around a lot. The job market is such that everyone's employed, and the young, especially, have so many options available. The best thing you can do is help them make informed choices about what to do with their lives. It's about what's right for them, rather than what their parents want them to be." — **By Jennifer Jacobs**

“The best thing you can do is help them [graduates] make informed choices about what to do with their lives. It's about what's right for them, rather than what their parents want them to be.” >MONA



YONG (ELAINE BOEY/THE EDGE), SEELAN (PATRICK GOH/THE EDGE), MONA (KENNY VAP/THE EDGE)

man Mokhtar from Khazanah, [Datuk Seri] Idris Jala [of Pemandu], Azran [Osman-Rani] from AirAsia X, Mark Chang [from JobStreet] and several leaders who inspired them with tips to unleash their full leadership potential."

It is this combination of factors, given over a four-month period or so, that helps boost the students' leadership trajectory.

Seelan is astounded with the projects these students have come up with, such as the 22-year-old who came up with a 120-page guide to make the study of the law more palatable. "He and his team did 30 interviews over seven weeks to come up with the guide. And this was done on weekends because he had classes to attend and exams to pass. When he presented the guide, we found it simply unbelievable. And I think thousands of copies have already gone out."

Interestingly, although Seelan is clearly impressed with the candidates, the YLA is not used as a recruiting mechanism for McKinsey: "Suyin was very clear about this. She designed it to make a difference to them [the youth], not as a tool for us to recruit."

Some of the youth go on to different universities. Some go on to high-powered jobs. But Seelan thinks the true impact of this training will only be seen some 20 years from now when these youngsters take over as leaders. "At the end of the day, how many people do you need to lead this country? You don't need 30 million. You need, say, a few hundred. And these young leaders are Malaysians, they're from local universities and they're committed to making a difference."

He also tips his hat to the mentors: "These are very busy people and they're willing to come in on Saturdays, which is peak family time, to do this. It's truly a selfless commitment."

And he is not slow to commend the McKinsey consultants: "As you know, we're not a nine-to-five profession. The people doing this have clients, they've got demanding projects and they're working extremely long hours. But even with that, they're still making time to do this."

And, of course, there are the talents. "These 20-some-things are highly driven and very talented. They're going to make a difference to this country. It's like ignition — you only need to spend five minutes with some of them to understand this."

When asked about the enormity of the undertaking, Seelan likes to talk about starfish. A man comes across a boy walking along a beach covered in thousands of starfish and throwing them back into the sea, one by one. When asked how he could possibly hope to make a difference (there are just too many starfish for one person to tackle), he picks up a starfish and throws it into the water and says, "There, I bet I made a difference to that one."

"Every starfish counts. That's why I'm very precise about the numbers: 171 young leaders. Trying to make a difference to Malaysia can be overwhelming but if you can just pick an area and start, one starfish at a time, you're off. And it builds and builds," he says. — **By Jennifer Jacobs**

## EY: Developing the right people

**E**rnst & Young (EY) country managing partner Malaysia, Datuk Abdul Rauf Rashid, believes that the way to forge ahead is to focus on developing the right sort of people for the company, and by extension, the community and the nation.

"EY has always put people at the heart of its strategy. We attract talented, bright people and while they are with us, we make it our goal to nurture their natural talents and develop them into future leaders," he says.

Rauf says the company offers these individuals opportunities, greater responsibilities and new challenges so they can create the future they are looking for. "Ultimately, we help provide them with the experiences and relationships that have a real positive impact on them, our clients and communities."

It's all about education and talent development. "To us, focusing on education and talent development is an investment in the workforce of tomorrow. After all, our young Malaysians are, and will be, the builders, the visionaries, and the achievers of tomorrow."

And part of this involves developing entrepreneurs. "Helping entrepreneurs is something that EY is known for in the marketplace. We have been a leader in advising entrepreneurial business for over three decades. The EY Entrepreneur of the Year award celebrates high-growth business leaders. By supporting and celebrating entrepreneurs, we're helping to bring economic development and jobs to the communities in which we live and work."

But it's not enough to develop the people. There is also a need to look at the physical impact a company has on the spaces it inhabits and through its business practices. "As an organisation, we are also committed to reducing our impact on the environment. As we look at rising energy costs, a changing public policy landscape and the evolving environmental mindset of our current and future employees, we need to be open to new ways of operating our business that are eco-friendly."

"We want to be seen as a leader in environmental sustainability. Not only is this an issue that is important to our people, it is one that can directly impact the future of our business. And it's one where we all can make a difference," Rauf points out.

EY is also involved in Ready4Work, an initiative that is jointly spearheaded by TalentCorp and MyLinE, an online resource for learning in English. "We provide information, guidance and advice through the Ready4Work portal to help young Malaysian talents prepare for the working world and contribute positively as a member of the workforce."

But this is not the only initiative the firm is involved in, in terms of engaging with young talent. "Our EY partners and leaders regularly participate in recruitment fairs abroad to attract Malaysian talent back home. I think it makes a difference to these talents abroad when they are able to meet, speak and interact directly with people who have been there and done that. Consequently, the attraction to return and contribute to the nation's economy is much stronger and more convincing."

EY also organises the Young Tax Professional of the Year, an international programme aimed at exposing students to the skills and attributes of a ac-

countant and tax professional at an early age. "It is an amazing opportunity to help enhance the knowledge and experience of our young Malaysians. It also helps provide a sound foundation for them to build their careers and contribute towards the growth of the profession in the country."

So, though saddened by the daily news of late, he nevertheless feels it is all part and parcel of the transition to a better nation and he is too busy lighting candles all over the place to have time to curse the darkness.

"We need to be positive and let our thoughts, words and actions be guided by respect, integrity and doing the right thing. I think if everyone keeps the final goal of what we want for our nation clearly in sight, we can get through this trying phase, and reach our destination," he says.

There is hope for a better tomorrow if everyone works towards it: "I can appreciate that it is easy enough to be cynical or fatalistic about what's happening in the country. However, such attitudes of disengaging ourselves from what is happening around us will not help make things better. I think we cannot simply give in or give up. Every one of us has a role to play in making this country a better place and we should play that role in a positive and constructive manner."

— **By Jennifer Jacobs** 

**👍👍 To us, focusing on education and talent development is an investment in the workforce of tomorrow. After all, our young Malaysians are, and will be, the builders, the visionaries, and the achievers of tomorrow. > RAUF** 

## Technip Asia Pacific: Focusing on the individual

**I**nvesting in Malaysia is more than just hiring people. It's about putting back what you have through human capital development programmes and bringing new technology into the country.

Such is the mantra of Lim Kwee Keong, senior vice-president of Technip Asia Pacific. Better known among his peers as KK Lim, he believes in driving a company forward through an emphasis on the individual. "The key to any company is the people, they're like your ambassadors," he says. "Training people and improving their skills make them want to stay with you longer, though some employers might differ in their views."

This in effect has led to Technip's work on advanced leading oil and gas engineering projects in Malaysia, putting the country on the map when it comes to new technology. This records huge developments for a company that started off with only simple capability engineering in the 1980s in Malaysia.

"Now, however, the office has full turnkey capabilities and we are capable of more. We've got the Petronas FLNG [floating liquefied natural gas] and Shell Malikai Tension Leg Platform projects going through the KL office, both being done out of Malaysia," says Lim. "These are technologically challenging jobs, putting us ahead of everybody else."

To cultivate the right skill sets and talents for such ambitious projects, Technip encourages international exposure for their employees. One would need experience working abroad in different environments and roles to be successful and really lead a team, says Lim. "This also brings diversity to the company. We've recognised this, so we actively promote people to work overseas through our International Mobility programme," he explains. "The programme rotates them through the offices and they work between three and five years abroad before returning and taking on bigger and better positions."

Employees are also given opportunities for self-development through the company's long-term structured Talent Management programme. It provides career guidance to employees as long as they are at Technip through career plan discussions with the human resource management team. Another offered initiative is the Lead-

ing Edge programme. Launched in 2006, high-potential employees are identified and groomed with the aim of becoming the company's future leaders.

Technip also places high importance on its potential and incoming employees through collaborations with local universities, and has set up the Graduate Development programme in conjunction with the Selangor Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC). Fresh graduates selected for this programme will go through basic knowledge training with SHRDC for two months before moving on to six months of practical training with the company.

Graduates receive full-on experience by working on projects with company employees and have the option of choosing between two types of programmes that are designed to develop piping designers and offshore structural engineers. On average, 16 graduates are admitted into each programme every year.

Most of the programme's graduates end up working with Technip and the company is also a good training ground for employees to move on to other regional offices, says Lim. "We're helping Malaysians excel, as we've seconded a lot of our own people to other overseas centres. [Our centres in] Indonesia, Thailand, China and Brunei have Malaysian heads."

Technip in Kuala Lumpur also conducts programmes with local universities to close the gap between classroom and real-world experiences for engineering students. One such programme is a research-based collaboration with Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) on model testing. The developed methods then become standards passed on to future students. Company engineers also frequent the campus twice a year to present lectures and seminars.


Another collaborative effort is the Seaweed Project, a sustainable development research programme done in conjunction with Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) to design moorings so that seaweed farms can withstand harsh environments all year round. The project is wholly executed by the students, with Technip employees acting only as technical consultants.


Today, 3,000 of Technip's 40,000 employees worldwide are based in Malaysia. Lim reports that Technip Malaysia's turnover rate this year has improved from the previous year, and wants to encourage more of his employees to dream big.

"Malaysia has a lot of talent, but many aren't grabbing opportunities," he says. "Although they are skilful and as good as engineers in any part of the world, they don't sell themselves very well and lack self-confidence. I would love to see them grow to their fullest potential."

In his own capacity, Lim hopes to inspire people to greater heights, and tries to do so by connecting with his employees informally. "Every two weeks, I have an informal chat with 15 random employees and we go for lunch," he says. "I keep it fairly informal. It's for me to see what makes them tick and, hopefully, inspire them to do more."

The topics range from oil and gas sector issues to leadership and self-development. Lim also uses this opportunity to identify the better employees. "I really enjoy this; you connect with people a lot better in a small group as you find that most of them will contribute to the conversation," he says.

"Overall, I think we have good development programmes, so we won't be the ones limiting your career. Rather, it's how far you want to go." — **By Emily Chow** 

**👍👍 Overall, I think we have good development programmes, so we won't be the ones limiting your career. Rather, it's how far you want to go. > LIM** 





## Agilent: Moulding youths for the future

**A**gilent Technologies Malaysia Sdn Bhd is clearly the torch-bearer among multinational corporations when it comes to developing Malaysian talent.

The global market leader in the manufacture of precise measurement tools and solutions has been actively developing and implementing programmes for youths of all ages. These include activities that promote science and mathematics among school-going Malaysians and events that encourage innovative thinking and industry skills development among engineering students.

Agilent is also an active participant in government initiatives aimed at developing technical expertise and talent in the electronics and electrical (E&E) and biotechnology industries. It participates in numerous public and private partnerships such as the Agilent Bio-Analytical Industry Development Programme, a two-year course for university students in the biotechnology field; FasTrack, a 12-month programme designed for engineering graduates; CREST (Collaborative Research in Science, Engineering & Technology), a platform for companies in the E&E industry and university students to collaborate on research projects; and the Innovate Malaysia Design Competition. Agilent is also the secretariat of the Penang Science Council and organiser of the annual Penang International Science Fair.

Why the investment? Simply put, Agilent sees a win-win outcome. Its long-term prospects depend on a well-established eco-system — companies in all parts of the supply-chain of the E&E industry that can produce products and services that meet global standards.

Agilent's quality and customer experience director Tay Eng Su says this eco-system includes companies that supply products and services and companies that provide more value-added services such as design and research and development. "Look at the big picture, as a company operating in the E&E industry, you will depend on suppliers and companies that offer a niche, specific expertise. Where are these companies located? If they are located overseas, you [the company, industry and country] do not have a competitive advantage. There are clearly strategic and operational advantages if they are in Malaysia."

This thinking is also the root of Agilent's practice of developing and investing in its business partners. "This takes effort from both parties. Take, for example, a supplier that we used about five years ago. At that time, they were only able to produce a basic product, which was far from the global specifications that we needed. So, we asked if it was willing to invest and develop its skills. Now, it is a loyal supplier that is able to provide world-class products," says

Tay. "We are moving up the value chain and looking for partners that can do specialised work like R&D. It is not easy to find now as there are only a few such companies but this landscape could change in the long run, with effort from companies such as Agilent and the government [working together]," says Tay.

Success is a globally competitive industry that is based in Malaysia for the long term. Even if it seems obvious, this is a formidable goal. "Agilent Technologies, formerly a part of Hewlett-Packard, has been operating in Penang for more than 40 years. We want to be around as long as possible. Consider the E&E industry in the US. At one point, it was a very strong industry but eventually, a large portion of its work and jobs left the country and were established in other parts of the world, such as in Penang. We are cognisant of this possibility and this is why we have invested so much in developing Malaysian youths," says Tay, who has been working for Agilent for about 25 years.

The success of the country's E&E industry, which comprises global market leaders, shows that Malaysians and Malaysia are on par with their global peers, says Tay. "Agilent's mission in talent development is shared by our employees [the company has just under 3,000 employees, of which 1,200 are engineers]. Almost 800 of our employees were volunteers at the Penang International Science Fair this year. The turnout of volunteers surprised me. And, after being part of numerous development initiatives, I can say that Malaysia truly has world-class talent."

— **By Elaine Boey**

“Agilent's mission in talent development is shared by our employees [the company has just under 3,000 employees, of which 1,200 are engineers]” >TAY



## MyHarapan: A platform for youths

**M**yHarapan, the Youth Trust Foundation, was established three years ago to give young people an independent platform to support their development as contributing citizens.

CEO Nurfarini Daing (who is better known as Nini) says it came about after youth participants in some focus groups said what was lacking was a platform that they could actually trust, one that was concerned with their well-being and development. "Even at such a young age, they felt like they had a lot to offer. But at the time, they would either have to be part of an organisation or be associated with a well-known company to get things moving. So we thought, let's actually do this. And when we set it up, we asked, what are you going to make of it?"

A lot, apparently. "In the last two years, a lot of projects have actually mushroomed and we only facilitate the process. They [the youths] are making an impact themselves and they're pulling this off with the minimal funding that we've given them."

But MyHarapan does look at taking what's on offer from the government and bringing it down to the level of the youth, making it real, so to speak. For instance, it ran the youth-defined ETP-GTP (Economic Transformation Programme-Government Transformation Programme) to see what the young people would make of it.

"We wanted them to define their ver-

sion of what ETP and GTP were, because nobody really knows, and to them, it probably stood for something like Electronic Transmission Protocol," Nurfarini laughs.

"And they talked about what the concepts meant to them and came up with their own initiatives. One group of young individuals, for instance, focused on how they could actually provide talent development processes for engineers, particularly in the field of engineering design. They've been working very closely with Strand Aerospace [Strand's CEO is their mentor] and Strand is actually one of the entry point projects [EPPs] for pure-play engineering."

Phyto, the group of young people in question, talked to engineers and came up with programmes to help engineers with soft skills, such as the ability and confidence to present in English. "We have very talented engineers but they lack the confidence to do things like make presentations in English. So, Phyto helps them with that," Nurfarini explains.

She says another notable project is Youth in Agriculture. "They are trying to 'sexify' the idea of being in agriculture, to convince parents that being a farmer is a lucrative business. These young people are from various universities all over Malaysia but they're now based in UiTM. So, they have students from various disciplines — business, marketing, architects, engineers — all coming together to see how they can look at agriculture as a serious career."

And they are coming up with projects to support the idea. "They're looking to start a natural farm in Sungai Buloh to get a lot more young people exposed to the idea of being a farmer."

A natural farm is not an organic farm in that it hasn't gone through the onerous and often expensive process of certification. But it does use the same basic tools such as composting and natural fertilisers. "You can call it the first step to a proper organic farm. And they are also trying to get people to subscribe to the idea of living a more sustainable life by farming," explains Nurfarini.

All in all, MyHarapan has given out RM1.5 million through a social grant to youth-led projects, large and small. "We do see an influx of people actually submitting applications for projects. And they are not just one-off charity projects. The thing they are looking at is how to make their project more sustainable and more of a social enterprise that can be self-funding."

This means, the youth in question are looking at these projects not as something to do while they're young but are actually considering them as a career. "And that's where we come in. How do we facilitate this process? A lot of people think it's crazy to look at social work before earning 'real money'. But we find it very encouraging and it is somewhat our raison d'être."

Nurfarini says social entrepreneurship has suddenly become sexy, especially among the youth. "And we might as well ride on that wave while we can. But we're only a piece of the puzzle. We need to get a lot more corporate-sector involvement."

Basically, all she has seen in her three years at MyHarapan gives her hope for the future of this country. "The Gen Y, despite what we think of them, have a heart for this sort of work. This is just pointing them in the right direction." — **By Jennifer Jacobs**

“They [the youths] are making an impact themselves and they're pulling this off with the minimal funding that we've given them” >NURFARINI





## Petronas' education initiatives

**We wanted to leverage on the strengths of the industry players, by getting the industry to play a role in nurturing students and making an impact on the university in terms of its curriculum. > ABDUL RAHIM**



**P**etroliaam Nasional Bhd (Petronas) has devoted part of its resources to building and training human capital. Raiha Azni Abdul Rahman, vice-president of its human resource management division, emphasises that as the company grows its business, it also invests in people.

"Human capital investment is equally as important as any other investment. We believe in 'growing our own timber', not just for Petronas, but for the industry."

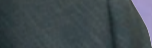
At the heart of human capital investment is education, something the company aims to nurture at the university level. A good example is Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), which was established in 1997 to offer engineering and information technology undergraduate

and postgraduate programmes. Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Hashim, vice-chancellor and CEO, explains the context in which the university was set up. "We wanted to leverage on the strengths of the industry players, by getting the industry to play a role in nurturing students and making an impact on the university in terms of its curriculum. We also wanted better collaboration between academicians and the industry."

Besides its academic programmes, the university also emphasises the importance of research and development work by its academicians. According to its website, the university collaborates with Petronas and local and foreign corporations in areas such as enhanced oil recovery, carbon dioxide management, deep-water technology, nanotechnology, green technology, biomedical technology, hybrid energy systems, intelligent city and sustainable resources. Last November, UTP became the first private university to be awarded a five-star rating by Malaysian Research Assessment Instrument (MyRA) for its research, development and commercialisation endeavours.

The teaching and learning processes of the university point towards an objective to produce graduates who have attributes under the UTP Well-Rounded Graduate Model. The seven attributes are technical compe-

**Human capital investment is equally as important as any other investment. We believe in 'growing our own timber', not just for Petronas, but for the industry > RAIHA**



**Nur Farahim interned at Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 in the UK. "I really enjoyed working and dealing with people of different cultures."**

### UTP'S STUDENTS SPEAK

Nur Farahim Jamil, 22, an electrical and electronics engineering student at Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP) says its industrial internship programme played a role in her enrolment decision. "UTP is well-known for its internship programme." From October to April this year, Nur Farahim did her internship with Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 team in Brackley, the UK. During her stint, she was assigned to the company's purchasing department, where she was involved in the purchasing of composite (such as carbon fibre) and mechanical (such as aluminium and

titanium) parts for the race cars. "I really enjoyed working and dealing with people of different cultures. I felt that my stint was too short."

A highlight of her attachment with the firm was to meet Formula One drivers and be among the few to see the company's most recent Formula 1 race car making its debut at the Silverstone Circuit. Although she cannot disclose the project that was part of her internship, she found it to be a good learning experience.

Parvindran Maratha, 21, was scheduled to begin an internship with a multinational

company based locally but UTP offered him an overseas internship based on his good grades. The information and communication technology undergraduate eventually began his internship with a website development company called SIWA Online GmbH in Hagenberg, Austria. During his internship period from last October to April this year, he helped to complete a customer management system (CMS) project.

He was also given the opportunity to develop a web-based mobile application called Whup.at, which is a

directory of amenities in four geographical areas in Upper Austria.

"While I learnt a lot, I found it challenging as the application had to be done in German and I was not proficient in the language. It was also my first time creating a mobile application, so I had to learn how to do it from scratch," says Parvindran.

His efforts paid off and Whup.at has been launched and can be used by anyone located within the four areas.

The company listed Parvindran as the founder of the application, an achievement that he is proud of.







tence, lifetime learning capacity, critical thinking, communication and behavioural skills, business acumen, practical aptitude and solution synthesis ability (ability to draw knowledge from multiple areas to create practical solution). Apart from academics, the university stresses extracurricular activities to ensure that the students get a more holistic education, Raiha explains. "We don't just want students to be good in their studies. We also want them to be involved in activities like performing arts, sport and music. These activities are the cornerstone for them to hone their leadership attributes. This is done with a view that after four years, they will be employable graduates with the X factor that the employers are looking for."

**LONG INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME**

A key focus of UTP's undergraduate curriculum is the Student Industrial Internship Programme. Before they enter their final year, students are placed in various companies for seven months — the longest internship programme in the industry. Collaboration has been done with about 400 companies,

including Petronas, General Electric, Schlumberger, Shell, Exxon Mobil, Intel and Agilent Technologies. Abdul Rahim says the length of the internship period is a win-win situation for both the companies as well as the students.

"We thought the industry average of between six and 12 weeks was rather too short to have hands-on experience. Seven months gives the company time to help the students learn. We wanted our students to really experience what the work environment in their industry is all about. This is also the time in which we hope they will develop their soft skills. The internship also serves as a recruitment platform for companies."

While attachments are usually with companies based in the country, students with a collective grade point average (CGPA) of 3.5 and above are given the opportunity to accept internships in foreign institutions and corporations in countries such as Austria, the UK and Germany. Before they begin their internship, the students and their supervisor will discuss with the company about the project that they will be undertaking throughout their internship.

The results of a long internship are evident from

the positive improvement seen in the students. "They become more confident, are able to communicate better and have better presentation skills. Thus, it becomes a pretty good proposition for companies to hire them as they can hit the road running once they graduate. We have companies that will come to us for recruitment, such as Schlumberger and Shell," says Abdul Rahim.

The university has much to be proud of as more than 95% of its students are employed within six months of graduating. Abdul Rahim has plans to reduce the period to three months.

UTP has also achieved other milestones over the years. Last November, the university was conferred a Tier-5 rating — which is considered excellent — under the Rating System for Malaysia Higher Education for its teaching and learning performance in its undergraduate programmes. In January, UTP was also rated Tier-5 under the Discipline-Based Rating System (D-SETARA) initiative introduced by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. Tier-6 is the highest tier. The rating is measured based on the quality of its undergraduate programmes in the engineering discipline.

— *By Tho Li Ming*

RAIHA (MOHD IZWAN MOHD NAZAM/THE EDGE), ABDUL RAHIM (KENNY YAP/THE EDGE)



Parvindran was named founder of the web-based mobile application Whup. at he developed while interning at SIWA Online GmbH



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## DIVERSITY ADVOCATES

Nation building is meaningless if efforts do not include empowering women, who today, make up more than half of the population. We speak to two gender diversity advocates – Chua Chai Ping of Accenture and Pun Tian Pouw of Korn Ferry International Malaysia – on current efforts to improve female participation in the workforce.

## Spreading the initiatives

Women participation in the workforce is an issue Accenture has always championed. Recently, the consulting group kicked its advocacy efforts up a notch by collaborating with TalentCorp to introduce gender diversity initiatives to other corporations.

According to Accenture's human resources country lead Chua Chai Ping, many companies today still hold back from changing existing structured work policies to allow for flexibility, thus preventing employees from returning to the workforce. "Perhaps it's a trust issue, a mindset or a fear that your employees won't deliver," Chua says. "But you need to start with education, so [my role in the collaboration is] to talk to organisations about it."

Accenture's partnership with TalentCorp is part of a larger initiative to address gender diversity and inclusiveness in the workforce. Chua is one of TalentCorp's nine Diversity Advocates, who are experienced human resource practitioners from various corporations. Through a competition called Flex Challenge, each advocate is assigned to a company to help implement gender-inclusive initiatives.

These initiatives are crucial to retain women in the workforce, elaborates Chua. It encourages those who have left to re-enter the workforce, which, in the long run, will result in more women in leadership or boardroom positions. Having been in the human resource and operations line for 10 years now, Chua intends to counter the arguments that say flexible initiatives translate into lower productivity.

"When we started Flex Challenge recently, it was about going out there to say, 'Look, we've [Accenture] done it, so don't worry. Jump on and try it out, so at least you'll know the outcome,'" she says. "I personally know of so many intelligent women who quit work to raise their family, but if we offer flexibility, there is a chance that they will return to the workforce."

"And this doesn't just appeal to the women but to the men as well, because you're giving them a better quality of life," she adds.

Chua's assigned company was 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), which eventually went on to beat seven other participants. The changes Chua recommended were small, she recalls, but they made a significant difference.

"They already had some ideas [to implement], so we gave them options, and it can start small, within the pockets of the organisation," she says. "Staggered hours, for example, is easy to implement and effective. We had 1MDB allow their employees to work from home during a two-week school holiday."

"After the contest, companies are encouraged to resume the initiatives but ultimately, it is their choice," Chua continues. "The competition was a test pilot to see what could be implemented at work, which isn't hard to do at all."

But flexible initiatives aren't just about getting women into the workforce and the boardroom. It's also about addressing the critical brain drain challenge that Malaysia faces. According to Chua, Malaysia has lost an estimated 700,000 working professionals to Singapore, a number that can be made up for if local companies harness their women talent by bringing them back to the workforce.

"If we do so, that alone can make up for the talent lost to Singapore and this is a compelling reason to do it," Chua says. "It's true that other countries suffer from brain drain as well but they also have the phenomenon of brain gain. For us, we lose our professionals and expertise but we don't bring that back in. We bring back foreign labourers rather than foreign professionals and that's where our equation becomes chronic."

"So, we need to balance that a bit more," she opines. "Malaysia is generally an open and tolerant society, so we should leverage that and bring in foreign talent to balance the equation."

The country's brain drain problem and gender diversity inclusiveness are issues that resonate deeply with Chua based on her personal experiences and family background. Her grandfather and mother had always advocated for women to work and giving back to the community, and Chua herself has turned down numerous opportunities to work abroad.

"It could have been very easy for me to work abroad, I was offered jobs in Shanghai and London but I didn't accept them," says the mother of two. "I've been there and we can have it all. It's about balance and choosing our battles and options wisely. We shouldn't just take the easy way out by quitting [because it's convenient]."

In the long run, Chua hopes more parents will accept and improve Malaysia as home for their family, rather than pushing their offspring and future generations to live abroad.

"I may not be able to control the choices that my children make, but I am able to control the options I give them," she says. "I don't want London and New York to be the only options. If there was a multiple choice, I'd want Malaysia to be an option too." — **By Emily Chow**

“We lose our professionals and expertise but we don't bring that back in. We bring back foreign labourers rather than foreign professionals and that's where our equation becomes chronic.”

> CHUA

”

## Equilibrium in the office

Pun Tian Pouw, or TP, as he likes to be called, finds joy in his life by advocating for women in the workplace as well volunteering for local non-government organisation (NGO)

Befrienders.

The principal consultant for Korn/Ferry International (KFI) Malaysia is one of TalentCorp's nine Diversity Advocates. It comes as no surprise that he holds strongly the belief that there must be equilibrium in the workplace for a country to progress. He looks to break down diversity barriers such as gender, race, physical (disabled vs able) and many other forms of discrimination in Malaysia's workforce.

"As a diversity advocate, I propagate and promote diversity in the workplace through radio, newspapers and various media platforms. Job applicants are also welcome to look at TalentCorp's online portal to apply to companies whose cultures fit what they're looking for," he says.

However, a main concern for him is women, or rather the lack of women, in the workforce. A balanced workforce will add to the growth of a nation, he says.

"Half the population in Malaysia is made up of women but this is not reflected in the workforce. Women are underleveraged resources, something the government is working to correct. It understands that women are crucial to the well-being of an organisation. More director training is being given to women to promote a higher percentage of women holding management positions. There are tax incentives for women who opt for child-

care and for those who employ women back into the workplace after giving birth. Many awards are given to companies that support work-life harmonisation, as I like to call it," says Pun.

Additionally, he says that an enabling environment for women should include flexible working arrangements. "I find the FlexWorkLife.my portal [by TalentCorp] to be a very useful way to raise awareness among organisations of the benefits and the dos and don'ts when adopting flexible-work-life arrangements, work-life benefits and family-friendly facilities. I strongly believe we will see a more robust, productive and engaged workforce in organisations that adopt such arrangements, leading to better retention of talent," he opines.

Pun is one of those people who see a bright future for Malaysia despite the negative news flow of late. For him, it is important that people have hope.

"Hope at a personal level is for us Malaysians to continue to be honest, optimistic, passionate and energetic. When we are honest with ourselves and others, have an optimistic outlook on life, are passionate about whatever we do...while still sustaining a high level of energy, there is hope. There is also hope for the nation to harness harmony, opportunities, progression and equilibrium."

"My hope for this nation is to instil and harness an abundance of harmony among us all. At the same time, there are many opportunities provided to all to work towards excellence as a nation. We must ensure we progress and maintain equilibrium for all," he says.

"It's like with family. You go through fights, we go through hardships but we don't lose hope in each other. We have been through global financial crises and natural disasters, why should we lose hope now? As long as there are people who are willing to stand up for the country and have a passion for the country, there will always be hope."

Having been exposed to social work from a young age, Pun grew up with the belief that it is a norm for people to help the less fortunate. "I remember when I was very young, my family lived in Kuala Lipis and I was about six when a big flood happened. People were in need of help. We took eight people into our home. We converted a small garage into a little home for people in need of shelter. We cooked food for them and gave them the support they needed," Pun shares.

He joined Befrienders eight years ago, primarily because he had friends who had committed suicide over failed relationships. "Befrienders provides emotional support to people who are suicidal, depressed or are in despair. In 2012, the executive director of Befrienders retired and there was a vacancy to fill. I felt that it was a perfect position for me to take on," he continues.

"People asked me why I did not just donate money and let others run the place but it is more than just the money. Joining the Befrienders full-time, I got to connect with the people in schools, ministries and other NGOs that were also playing a supportive role in nation building."

— **By Sarah Voon**

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> PUN

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# Celebrating Malaysia's 56 years of Independence

From the Board of Directors, Management and Staff of The Edge Communications Sdn Bhd

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While we celebrate Merdeka and what we have achieved as a nation, let's also look towards where we are heading and what we need to do together to get there. We at TalentCorp would like to build effective partnerships with you and other leading employers in order to enhance talent development in your organisation as well as our country. Let's grow together through partnership.