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Tertiary education on air from next year

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THE launching of MetroVision's news on the Internet by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Aug 18 marks a first for a television station in the country.

The managing director of MetroVision, Sabri Abdul Rahman, stated at the launch that the station was working with several local universities to provide distance learning programmes next year.

As a start, a memorandum of understanding between Television Airtime Services Education Management Sdn Bhd - a shareholder of Metrovision - and United Multimedia Sdn Bhd - a subsidiary of Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (Unitar) - early this month will open up a new chapter in Malaysian education.

The joint venture project, the first of its kind in Malaysia, calls for the establishment of University of the Air (UOA) programmes which will be transmitted by MetroVision.

The signing of an MoU between Television Airtime Services and MetroVision to transmit lectures on the public channel will strengthen the drive for "universities without walls". The university that will ride on the airwaves will offer required National Accreditation Board and university courses early next year.

Like any other local university, a student will have to satisfy the minimum requirement of 120 credit hours/units before he or she can graduate. This will take about three years but the fast track students may graduate sooner depending on how many courses they can digest per semester.

For starters, at least two programmes have been identified. One is a Diploma or Bachelor in Business Management or diploma leading to a Bachelor of Business Management. Another programme is Information Technology.

UOA's philosophy is to give every Malaysian a chance to be exposed to tertiary education at no cost. As long as you have a television at home you will be able to follow the courses at leisure but if you are interested in enrolling for a diploma or degree, you will have to register as a student and take part in lectures, tutorials and exams at Unitar.

Registration fees for five courses each semester will not burden parents or students. Each course will cost only a minimal amount compared with the present fees at private institutions of higher learning which amount to about RM4,500 per semester.

With UOA's programmes, the registration fees will be slashed by 85 per cent. We know that the cost of education has never been cheap but this is one institution which offers quality tertiary education within everybody's means.

The programmes will be offered in stages. Twenty-two basic and intermediate courses will be made available for the first three semesters leading to higher-level courses for students to major and specialise in. Major courses in business and IT will be offered in the fourth and following semesters.

A student who cannot afford to finish 120 credit hours may opt for 80 hours and settle for a diploma instead. If he decides to continue later, he may do so and upon completing 120 hours, will be awarded a bachelor's degree.

The search for a quality partner who shared the same philosophy and

aspiration was not easy. Some of the local universities that we approached were neither keen nor serious about taking up our offer.

It was a dream come true when we met and discussed the possibility of the UOA with the president of Unitar, Datuk Dr Syed Othman Alhabshi.

The first meeting gave both parties the feeling that we were heading in the same direction. Six months later, we found ourselves preparing an MoU for the project.

Many will wonder and perhaps question the quality of education that they will get from a programme which costs only a few hundred ringgit per semester. Our philosophy is to give everyone a chance at getting quality tertiary education and quality is the output of high calibre personnel.

The lecturers at Unitar are made up of highly qualified and experienced people from various universities in the country. They are professors, associate professors and lecturers who are futuristic in outlook.

They have visions but cannot realise them within the walls of the ordinary university.

MetroVision and Television Airtime Services are made up of professionals who are experienced, diligent, highly qualified and far-sighted. Most of them were trained abroad. Their leaders are "cyber-minded futurists" and plan ahead into the next century.

What brought these people together? The answer is ... their common goal and commitment. They also share the same philosophy on a "university without walls" and they believe that together they can make it happen.

Our targets are not only those who will enrol as full-time students of the UOA programmes, but also working people and housewives who can study at home according to their own schedule.