

Tie in with Silicon Valley gurus

STAR - 3 FEB 2002

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IT'S a rags-to-riches story that began when the protagonists comprising people from India and Pakistan moved from the Indus Valley to Silicon Valley.

Arriving in the United States in the 70s and 80s with only a few dollars in their pockets, they washed dishes, cut grass and waited on tables to finance their education up to masters and doctorate levels.

Today, they are successful multi-millionaire entrepreneurs who have been dubbed 'Angels' in South California by the US media after they generated more than RM800bil in Silicon Valley's IT business in the past decade.

And they now feel it is time to "give back to society" by providing help and guidance to second-generation immigrants from the Indus Valley.

Organised under The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE), they also want to give Malaysians an opportunity to learn new information technologies in the United States and India.

A 12-man TiE delegation met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week, and also witnessed the launch of the Malaysian TiE chapter.

"Malaysians would have the opportunity to secure internships with leading companies in Silicon Valley to develop their entrepreneurial skills in high technology," said Malaysian TiE president Tan Sri G. Gnanalingam who is also executive chairman of Westport Bhd.

"If Malaysia wants to leapfrog into the knowledge era, it is critical that our entrepreneurs build their business development skills together with their knowledge of high-tech applications," he said.

"Malaysia was the world's leading producer of natural rubber, palm oil and cocoa. None of these seedlings originated in the country but were brought in from other countries."

Similarly, he said, Malaysia has the potential of becoming a world leader in the knowledge economy.

"IT know-how can also be acquired by Malaysians going on scholarships and internships with leading Silicon Valley companies.

There is no substitute for the real thing and Malaysians need to learn for the country to move into the area of high technology."

Gnanalingam said Dr Mahathir was very receptive to TiE's offer. "By gaining accelerated knowledge in high-tech IT developments, Malaysians will position the nation and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) on the forefront," he said.

"Young Malaysian will also be inspired and enlightened through a hands-on approach in the mentoring process which TiE practises."

The MSC, Gnanalingam said, had the potential to replicate the success story of Silicon Valley. "If preparations by the entrepreneurs meet the opportunities offered by the Government, then they can be successful. The harder one works the luckier the person gets."

Formed in 1992, TiE has more than 30 chapters worldwide comprising 10,000 members. It is a non-profit organisation whose main objective is to inspire others to become entrepreneurs by providing a forum for them to work with other successful business people.

Leading TiE members include Deepak Chopra, Hotmail founder Sabeer Bhatia, Infosys chairman Narayana Murthy and Kanwal Rekhi, the chairman of TiE.

Safi Qureshey, Southern California TiE president who was with the group that met Dr Mahathir, said his company was developing a chip for the revolutionary Voice Over Internet Phone laptop.

"We hope to have it ready in about two years," he said. "With it, you can make your phone call from your laptop. Phone calls will also be less than one-fifth the cost because of the use of broadband network."

He said Avaz, his company in the United States and Pakistan, is willing to train Malaysian students in chip design. "I am now negotiating with local Malaysian companies so that we will be able to share our knowledge through our MSC registered company.

"Using our US technology, we want to develop the chip in Malaysia jointly with Mimos research and development facilities," Safi said.