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Locals at the helm of Siemens

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LOCAL talents have started to make way to the top in Siemens Malaysia Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Germany's giant technology multinational Siemens AG, indicating a recognition of Malaysian skills and expertise.

This follows the appointment of Ho Kah Sing (see CORRECTION above) to head one of the firm's biggest divisions, information and communications networks (ICN). He is the first Malaysian to be appointed as the senior vice-president of ICN.

The company had also appointed Ling Chee Hoe to be the head of Siemens' business services and Chan Chee Wah as head of the industrial solutions and services.

More Malaysians are expected to be appointed to lead Siemens' business units and divisions in line with the company's plan to transfer its knowledge and technology to the country.

What makes such appointments significant is that these local senior management executives are either in their 30s or have just reached 40. Ho, for instance is barely 36, while Ling is only 34 and Chan is 40.

According to Ho, the move is also in line with the Government's objective, particularly Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself, who wants to see multinational corporations in the country transfer their technology to local people.

"Siemens shares the same aspiration, as in the long run, the company wants to transfer its knowledge and technology as well as build local workforce," he said in an interview with Business Times in Petaling Jaya last month.

Siemens, as a group, has a large education budget worldwide which it utilises to train students in the fields of information technology and other technical areas.

In Malaysia, Siemens has established various cooperation with local universities and set up numerous joint-venture companies with local partners. Its regional training centre, called FutureLab, located at the KLCC Twin Towers has already benefiting local and regional companies. The centre, which was opened in 1998, is equipped with a comprehensive range of information technology applications.

Last year, Malaysia was chosen as a site for Siemens' Integrated Services Applications Centre of Competence. The centre offers systems integration, project management, as well as network engineering and design to the company's customers in the region.

Siemens is also an active participant in the country's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) as it is represented in the MSC International Advisory Panel, which helps chart the course of the MSC. Currently, about 9,000 people are working under Siemens' various operations in Malaysia.

Speaking about ICN, Ho said all of the division's 112 staff were locals, except one expatriate, who is the division's commercial vice-president.

Majority of the staff in the ICN division are in the technical segment while the rest are in the management, sales and commercial sides. This shows that the local workforce has the necessary skills and expertise in technical areas, he noted.

Ho, who took over the senior post from a German expatriate, is not new to the telecommunications field as he joined Siemens' network systems division in 1995. He then moved to the company's public communication network division, which later merged with private communication network

division to form ICN. He aims to make Siemens ICN as the leader in the local information technology and networks industry.

To achieve this, Ho said, he would apply his experience, local knowledge and familiarity with the market.

"ICN plays a very important role in Siemens' success," Ho noted. Siemens' ICN group is a provider of integrated voice and data networks for enterprises, carriers and service providers. It offers end-to-end solutions combined with local expertise.

Its comprehensive portfolio comprises Internet Protocol-based convergence solutions, a full range of products for broadband access, optical transport networks as well as the integration, services and applications business. Siemens started its ICN here in 1994 with around 5 staff and has since expanded.

Ho said the local ICN division has grown positively with widening market share.

Currently, its client base comprises of two groups - the first are service providers such as telecommunication companies (telcos) and the second consist of the corporate segment (non-telcos) such as multinationals and government sector.

With many on-going projects in hand, the division is unfazed with the economic slowdown. According to Ho, the strongest year for the unit and Siemens Malaysia as a whole was in 1998 when the region was hit by the financial crisis.

While its counterpart at its parent company is devising measures to counter the global economic slowdown and the downturn in the industry, Malaysia ICN has no plan to cutback planned investment in the country or to slash jobs. The ICN division is in fact still recruiting people with technical skills.

Siemens Malaysia, which has been in the country for more than 25 years, is now present in key sectors such as energy, information technology and communications, components, transportation, building technologies, healthcare and fire, alarm and security systems.

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