

08/09/2003

Tapping the tech talent pool

THE basic physical infrastructure has been laid. But now comes the challenge of marshalling the human resources to take the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) through its more sophisticated second phase. Harnessing the necessary human talent is crucial if the MSC is to leapfrog into the higher reaches of technology. The key role of talent in this endeavour is recognised acutely by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the MSC's International Advisory Panel (IAP).

Dr Mahathir has already said that to give freedom to researchers to work independently, regulations on the use of government funds for research and development will be relaxed. This will also facilitate greater co-operation between universities and industry in IT. Ideas and inventions that make a lasting impact on society do not arise in a vacuum.

The right conditions must exist to encourage and nurture inventive minds to their full potential. Talented people must also be provided with the right kind of training if their talent is to be maximised. The IAP has suggested setting up a specialised university dedicated to certain sectors of IT, to provide leadership training and possibly co-operate directly with IT companies. Perhaps the Multimedia University can be expanded to fulfil this role. Better still, a purely research university should be set up as is the case in some developed countries.

While building up the Malaysian talent pool, local professionals must learn as fast and as much as they can from the foreign entrepreneurs and specialists who invest and work in the MSC-status companies. Globalisation means there can be collaborative research between Malaysians and expatriates in cutting-edge areas where we still lag. A good example of this is the joint venture with Japanese companies to make the advanced MM chip. However, we must not be satisfied with joint research. Over the longer term, we must undertake more of our own R and D and move up the technology value chain. This will result in advanced IT products and services which are competitive in the world market.