

**KERATAN AKHBAR-AKHBAR TEMPATAN
TARIKH: 6 MEI 2016 (JUMAAT)**

Bil	Tajuk	Akhbar
1.	A glimmer of hope for science	New Straits Times
2.	Penerbangan mikro graviti pertama	Sinar Harian
3.	Malaysia bolot lima anugerah pada WSIS 2016 di Geneva	BERNAMA
4.	Industri telekomunikasi digesa main peranan tangani isu global	BERNAMA
5.	Keluar mengundi awal, petang hujan	Utusan Malaysia
6.	Berhenti menjual pengecas telefon tiruan - Suruhanjaya Tenaga	Utusan Malaysia
7.	Risk – taking in business	The Star
8.	Advancing study on weather	The Star

A glimmer of hope for science

CHALLENGES: The new Science, Technology and Innovation Master Plan must be more comprehensive and not another wasted effort

THE nation's science is in poor shape. Few would dispute that, most of all the science community. Interest among students in science is waning. Less than 30 per cent take up science. Many do not believe science can offer a satisfying career. A growing number prefer to become footballers. They are better paid. The industry is also not investing much in science. Instead of spending their own money to develop products, many still look to government grants. Even government planning bodies have lost hope in science. Many claim science has not truly delivered on its promise.

A recent intellectual discourse hosted by the Academy of Sciences Malaysia (ASM) made another attempt to improve the situation. A panel was assembled to deliberate on a new Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Master Plan.

ASM has made many attempts in the past to change the fate of science for the better. Not too long ago, a new Science Act was proposed to

transform science governance in the country. Admittedly, poor science governance is one contributing factor. This was not well received basically on the grounds that some interest groups may have to surrender their power turf.

There was also an attempt to revamp the teaching of science, taking the cue from some successful models elsewhere. Unfortunately, most such attempts fell on deaf ears. But, this time around, things may be different. At that ASM discourse, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Wilfred Madius Tangau gave a refreshing keynote address. Judging from the many messages he made during that presentation, there may be a strong glimmer of hope for science. Fellows of ASM who attended the event agreed that this may be the opportunity we have been waiting for to break the deadlock. Science may at least see better days ahead.

In his address, the minister spoke frankly about the nation's

many challenges in science that call for serious scrutiny. Unless the obstacles are tackled in an objective manner, our aspirations to become a strong force in the world's innovation-led economy may be derailed.

First, he urged we should no longer work in silos. He admitted the fact that science is an agenda for all ministries, and not something exclusively within the domain of the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry.

Second, he strongly advocated more investment in data gathering to guide the effective implementation of all science initiatives. He was full of praise for the Science Outlook report, recently unveiled by ASM.

To him, the report which was produced for the first time using ASM's own funds, provided an excellent account of the poor state the nation's science is in. Instead of the earlier plan to undertake the survey every two years, the minister has urged that the exercise be done on a yearly basis. Though burdensome for ASM, fellows of the academy showed willingness to do it.

The minister also applauded many of the recommendations of the report. The call to relook the national STI Master Plan attracted his interest. The panel discourse was conducted basically to mine ideas from fellows on how to best proceed to formulate the plan. Unfortunately, the panel was consumed with other matters irrelevant to the theme.

The discourse should have touched on issues, including why we need the plan, what should be the key substance of the plan, how to generate the plan and the timeline for the formulation of the plan. All these were unfortunately missing in the discussion. The presentation which critically compared the nation's bioeconomy plan with that of China's was the only one which stood out. It may warrant another workshop to deliberate on the issues that matter.

One thing is for sure, though. We have produced many plans for science in the past. In fact, even the ministry's National Science Technology and Innovation Policy 3 (NSTIP 3) has yet to run its full course. Yet, we are thinking of a master plan. Much has been written about the shortcomings of NSTIP3, especially its lack of realistic action plans.

The STI Master Plan must therefore be more comprehensive. This is because without effective implementation, which includes actions in monitoring and evaluation, the new plan will not deliver what the minister and the nation's science community have in mind. It should not be another wasted effort!

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Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Wilfred Madius Tangau says science is an agenda for all ministries



DR AHMAD IBRAHIM

Penerbangan mikro graviti pertama

■ NOR ATIEYAH YUSOFF

ZG Space City Malaysia Sdn Bhd (ZG) melancarkan program penerbangan mikro graviti atau 'Microgravity Flight' pertama di Malaysia, seakan pengalaman di luar angkasa.

Pengasas ZG, Datuk Steven Gok berkata, projek tersebut tidak dapat direalisasikan tanpa bantuan dan galakan dari seluruh dunia.

"Program ini sebenarnya sudah lama diperkenalkan di mata dunia, namun baru sahaja mengaplikasikannya di negara ini.

"Bermula dengan impian, saya sedar ramai menunggu peluang keemasan untuk menyertai program ini," katanya ketika pelancaran program tersebut di Pusat Konvensyen Antarabangsa Genting, baru-baru ini.

Acara pelancaran turut dihadiri ahli ZG Club dari

11 buah negara sempena pelancaran program dan kelab berkenaan.

Katanya, melihat kepentingan program berkenaan, ia dapat menarik lebih ramai penyertaan untuk menyertai penerbangan unik itu.

Sehingga kini, ZG mempunyai 5,000 ahli dalam masa enam bulan dan program tersebut menarik perhatian mereka.

"Saya amat menghargai komitmen dan keberanian mereka menyokong industri baharu ini, selaras dengan perkembangan teknologi.

"ZG percaya dengan kepakaran teknikal yang disediakan agensi kerajaan tempatan bagi menggalakkan pelancongan angkasa ke mata dunia," katanya.

Beliau turut menerima kerjasama Kementerian Sains, Teknologi dan Inovasi (MOSTI) bagi menyaksi-



Steven (kanan) selepas menyampaikan cenderahati kepada jemputan kehormat di Malam Gala ZG, baru-baru ini.

kan satu sejarah terlarak di Malaysia.

Pertubuhan Pelancongan

Angkasa, Spaceland Srl and ZG Italia juga bekerjasama dalam perkongsian strategik

pelancongan angkasa itu.

"Penerbangan mikro graviti ini bakal menjadi satu peng-

alaman yang belum pernah dilakukan di negara ini.

"Dalam projek ini, peserta akan menikmati pengalaman terapung dan melambung di udara," katanya.

Projek tersebut masih lagi merangka tarikh penerbangan dan yuran penyertaan menecah A\$20,000 seorang.

Sementara itu, angkasan negara, Datuk Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Syukor Al Masrie percaya, dengan keberanian ZG menerokai industri baharu itu mampu menarik lebih ramai pelancong ke negara ini.

"Saya menyokong sepenuhnya inisiatif itu oleh ZG yang menjadi penyedia penerbangan mikro graviti komersial di Asia," katanya.

Untuk maklumat lanjut tentang ZG Space City Malaysia Sdn Bhd, boleh mengunjungi laman sesawang www.spaceportmalaysia.com/V3/zero_g_malaysia.html.

