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PEOPLE &amp; EVENTS

## Cover story: Dzuleira Abu Bakar leads the tech revolution in Malaysia

By Naseem Randhawa 02 Sep 2021

Witnessing the progression of Malaysia's tech ecosystem for more than 10 years now, the CEO of Technology Park Malaysia, [Dzuleira Abu Bakar](#), is setting the stage for bigger and better things to come.

Having done research into her impressive career trajectory and mammoth scope of responsibilities, it was rather surprising to be greeted by a petite figure on a sombre rainy afternoon, whose upbeat personality shines as bright as the sun as she warmly welcomes us into her beautiful home.

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Dzuleira Abu Bakar's energy radiates with every word she speaks and it is infectious. Generously answering every one of the questions with neither pause nor hesitancy, and with what feels like unhuman-like swiftness, one starts to wonder if the tech leader is somehow a genetically enhanced bionic woman. Putting self-humouring thoughts aside, her effortless command of the room, wit, and eloquence quickly assert how she came to be the CEO of Technology Park Malaysia.

As the former CEO of the Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Centre (MaGIC), Dzuleira was appointed by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) in April 2021 to lead MaGIC's merger with Technology Park Malaysia (TPM) to establish Malaysia's very own Silicon Valley. It is part of the government's larger efforts to restructure and consolidate its agencies to ensure that they are well positioned to execute the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (DSTIN) and the Malaysian Science Technology Innovation and Economic Development Framework (MySTIE 10-10).



Outfit from Gucci.

With over 600 acres of land, TPM now houses 147 companies such as labs, local and foreign tech firms and, most importantly, serves as a technology incubator to connect technology producers with technology seekers.

“TPM provides local technological solutions to solve real-world problems. We seek to remove barriers, provide facilitation, look at regulatory approvals, certifications, and everything else tech related,” explains Dzuleira in a single breath when asked to sum up the vast objectives of TPM.

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Dzuleira Abu Bakar

The appointment of Dzuleira was met with much enthusiasm in the tech industry. With MaGIC, she managed to achieve many milestones. In just two years under her leadership, the organisation achieved RM760 million in total value creation, impacted 26,327 participants via their various programmes, secured five international partnerships and the list goes on.



Jacket, top, and necklace from Gucci.

It is funny to think that all this might've not happened as Dzuleira contemplated going down a completely different path after high school.

“I had wanted to go into Journalism,” she reveals. “But my parents strongly advised me against it and wanted me to study medicine.”

Born in Penang but having spent her public school years in Sabah, Dzuleira recalls how she had applied for scholarships to study abroad, but due to the Asian financial crisis of 1996 that badly affected Malaysia's economy, she had to rethink her plans.

“All my applications for scholarships were rejected and I was devastated. It made me depressed not knowing what to do next,” she admits. “I had to join a local university and in hindsight, I think that worked out great for me.”



Outfit from Salvatore Ferragamo.

Dzuleira pursued a Degree in Law at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) but upon graduating found that being a lawyer was not her calling. She simply couldn't see herself dealing with legal paperwork on a day-to-day basis.

“All my university friends were applying at legal firms and there I was, completely lost,” she says. “But I was also a bit of a rebel at the time. I

wanted to do something different and so I randomly applied for jobs via ads in a local newspaper.”

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To help other women you must start with yourself. My personal network of support are the women before me who have blazed their own paths.

Dzuleira Abu Bakar

Describing it as an “accidental destiny”, she found herself immersed in the exciting world of tech with Astronautic Technology, a local government agency involved in satellite technology. In just two months, she was flying to America with her bosses to sit in at important meetings and take notes. She then casually mentions her few meetings at SpaceX with the main techpreneur himself, Elon Musk.

“Not many know that Astronautic Technology was one of the first commercial payloads for SpaceX, enabling their commercial flights,” Dzuleira reveals as I then take the opportunity to ask her what Musk is really like in person.



“He seems a little aloof and loves his sports cars. My recollection of him in a few of our meetings is that he is very brief and direct,” she shares. “He mostly listens and processes things a lot and leaves the leading of the deals handled by his then-vice president now-president, Gwynne Shotwell.”

As a 24-year-old given an amazing opportunity, Dzuleira found the experience inspiring and this led her to advance herself. While working, she decided to pursue her Masters in Management and Finance at Universiti Malaya part-time. The qualification allowed her to climb up the ladder at Astronautic, and she eventually took on the role of Director of Legal and Business Development.



After a five-year run, she joined Malaysia Venture Capital Management Berhad as her first stint in the investment world. The fact that she had experience in technology gave her a leg up in terms of what she wanted to look for in tech investments. In her four years there, she evaluated close to 400 companies. ×

“The whole technology realm was very different ten years ago and I consider myself fortunate to witness the evolution of technology,” she reflects. “I like to think that I have a full view of the tech ecosystem in Malaysia and how it grew.”



Outfit from Salvatore Ferragamo.

Having also held top positions as the Vice President, Managing Directors' Office at Khazanah Nasional Berhad and as the CEO of Cradle Seed Ventures (CSV), Dzuleira reveals that people are often shocked that her successful career stems a local tertiary education. ×

“Most people are in disbelief. They ask me, “Did you really go to UiTM?” and I’m like, “Yeah, of course!”” she laughs. “The common misconception is that if you go to a local university, you don’t carry yourself in the manner that the foreign graduates do, and that’s absolutely wrong!”

We have to become a nation that produces more technology for our own consumption. Importing technology from all over the world is not sustainable from an economic perspective or talent development perspective.

Dzuleira Abu Bakar

As a living testament to her statement, Dzuleira stresses how it’s more important how one uses their education more than anything else. Having interviewed foreign graduates who don’t often make the cut, she believes that although the qualifications may look good on paper, it does not guarantee employability. In fact, she finds that local graduates fare better in terms of being more critical in presenting their points and are more confident as well.

“It all boils down to the person itself and how much effort they are willing to put in. A degree from abroad is not a sure recipe for success and employers should realise that,” she says. “Work ethic, integrity, and emotional intelligence can’t be taught.”



This cover story appears in Prestige Malaysia's September 2021 issue. Read the full magazine for free on [Magzter](https://www.magzter.com).

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Naseem Randhawa

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