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TPM's strategic location and MaGIC capabilities would help make Malaysia into a tech provider, says TPM CEO

by AFIQ AZIZ / Pic by BERNAMA

IN APRIL, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (Mosti) decided to merge all relevant resources within its capacity including the country technology park caretaker — Technology Park Malaysia Corp Sdn Bhd (TPM).

The then Mosti Minister, Khairy Jamaluddin, “transferred” Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC) CEO Dzulkeila Abu Bakar (*picture*), 41, to become group CEO of TPM and lead the innovation and the consolidation plan of TPM with MaGIC.

The law graduate from UiTM (Mara University of technology) had held several investment-related portfolios including being a VP of Malaysia Venture Capital

Management Bhd (Mavcap) in 2015 and at Khazanah Nasional Bhd. She led Cradle Seed Ventures (CSV) for almost three years after leaving Mavcap.

As CEO and general partner of CSV, a subsidiary of Cradle Fund Sdn Bhd, her interest and knowledge expanded across digital, software, SaaS (software as a service), e-commerce and many other tech verticals, including the investment portfolio of Involve Asia, one of the largest affiliate marketing solutions providers.

After CSV, Dzuleira was then entrusted to lead MaGIC as CEO for two years before taking the driving seat at TPM in April this year, replacing Sharbani Harun, TPM's group CFO who was appointed as acting CEO upon the departure of Che Akhma Ismail in February 2020.

Dzuleira believes it is never too late for Malaysia to excel in technological innovation and house plenty of tech start-ups in future, with the right strategy to enable the plan.

In an interview with *The Malaysian Reserve (TMR)* recently, Dzuleira said the combination of TPM strategic location and MaGIC capabilities would help make Malaysia into a tech provider rather than a tech user.

Following are the excerpts of the 40 minutes online interview.

TMR: Can you give some background and updates of the consolidation plan between TPM and other agencies under Mosti? What is the agenda?

Dzuleira: My move from MaGIC to TPM was driven by a new mandate under Mosti who wanted an establishment of a technology commercialisation accelerator (TCA). This concept, developed by Mosti, was presented by the Academy of Sciences Malaysia and then presented to the National Science Council.

The objective of this concept is to look at the gaps between the technology and commercialisation ecosystem in Malaysia.

The initial point brought up to the TCA introduction was, what we can do to increase the number of commercialised entities in Malaysia, how do we accelerate technology and how do we accelerate the number or growth of technology companies in Malaysia.

As of now, if you think about start-ups in Malaysia, we do not have enough that we can shout about. So, how do we transform into having a larger number of technology companies?

In Malaysia, while we are talking about this, especially on the commercialisation activity, the processes are not something that are as actively managed as in other countries.

Our commercialisation rate is quite low competitively, with an average of 15%-20% within the last couple of years.

This was despite the fact that we are having about eleven to twelve research institutes (RIs) in Malaysia consisting of public and private sector research institutes.

On top of this, we do have close to 20 over public universities. These public and private universities churn out research and development (R&D), which are conducted by related faculties, students and lecturers. But where does this R&D go? This is the big question mark.

TMR: So, TPM plans to consolidate the R&D works?

Dzuleira: Sometimes, most often, these R&Ds remain with the RIs and the universities because from the perspective of the researchers/innovators, there is no clear method of bringing it out to the market.

Although you have commercialisation activities by the corporate and various institutions, it needs to be centralised.

So, Mosti believes it is the right time to look at all functions that involve commercialisation activities. This is where the ministry looked into MaGIC because the body involves commercialisation programmes.

It handles capacity building, provides accelerator programmes to companies that want to accelerate the products into the market.

It also provides market access support which connects start-ups to funding. Magic connects them to corporations for market access locally and internationally. MaGIC is the lead secretariat for National Tech and Innovation Sandbox (NTIS).

Other members of the secretariats are TPM, Mimos Bhd, Futurise Sdn Bhd and Malaysian Technology Development Corp as funding partner.

NTIS is a platform that allows eligible researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs to test their products and services in a live environment and qualify for grants to bring those products and services to market.

As for TCA, it will also involve other ministries like the Economic Planning Unit and Research Management Agency (RMA).

RMA will coordinate with all research institutions in Malaysia that will provide the research while TCA will execute the commercialisation process.

TMR: Players and startups are looking at how regulators can remove or minimise red tape. How can TCA play this role?

Dzuleira: This is where MaGIC's NTIS also comes in. NTIS does regulatory facilitation. For instance, typically businesses-related to drones or equipment and

solutions that fall under healthcare would need to get many types of approvals and licenses before they can get their product into the market.

NTIS will do the facilitation work from taking the product and services and assessing, vetting their technical and commercial viability and facilitating through regulatory facilitation.

NTIS will speak to the regulators to help provide approvals or look into regulations that need amendments to enable this innovation to go to market. We also facilitate technology that has market hindrance.

TMR: But why is TPM an ideal location for the TCA?

Dzuleira: TPM is located in a very prime location with close proximity to the financial centre in KL and connected to all of other tech townships like Cyberjaya and also Putrajaya.

At this juncture, there are close to 147 companies based out of TPM, of which 127 are Malaysian, 20 are multinational firms.

We have technology clusters in fields like ICT, Support services, Engineering, Biotech, Greentech and Nanotech.

TPM also provides 4th Generation Incubation Services for start-ups or small and medium enterprise tech companies including nurturing, coaching, mentoring, training and consultancy from ideation to commercialisation.

Commercialisation assistance in TPM has created technology and market linker between the industry and academia.

TPM is a tech park that was incorporated in 1996 and provides infrastructure for technology companies for local and international bases. The right ecosystem in TPM needs to be accelerated by this establishment of TCA.

So, it only makes sense from a Mosti perspective, it was the best time to merge both entities to optimise resources and realign focus rather than running two big entities almost doing similar things.

TMR: Through this plan, how will TPM benchmark to other successful nations?

Dzuleira: We have got several benchmarks, like Thailand Science Park, Korean Media Digital City, The Singapore Science Park and Bandung Techno Park in Indonesia. We have ongoing partnership with these regional as well as international tech parks to realise our vision.

As far as Malaysia is concerned, TPM has all the right ingredients as we are globally recognised. We are in that transformation process and are looking at the areas of strengths and weaknesses that TPM has.

There are pockets of opportunity within TPM right now with plots of lands that are undeveloped, which will be developed under the TCA model with a new mandate. This includes the negotiation of AI park development in phase 3 — which is largely undeveloped now.

The phase 3 — which was aimed to be an integrated AI technology development centre would be able to attract investment and multinational corporations to be based out of TPM. It will also encourage technology start-ups to be based out of there. That is our five-year long term plan now.

We are currently in discussion with several partners to materialise the plan. Hopefully it can be finalised by year's end upon the government's approval.

TMR: For you to be able to do this, you need to restructure the resources, the operations and how TPM works. How did it go so far?

Dzuleira: I am here to transform the business, relook at new revenue generation activities and improve infrastructure that we will offer to technology companies, as well as to look at other new things we can incorporate into tech parks.

We are looking at developing a lot more technology development within the TPM to increase our revenue base by many times.

At an operational level, TPM is a large entity with a complex structure. There are a lot of structural issues that we are looking at.

There are challenges with manpower, upgrading and aligning cultures between MaGIC and TPM. But these are not challenges that cannot be overcome and we have foreseen and predicted. I am confident it can be overcome and we will be able to deliver a brand-new entity as soon as possible.

We have identified resources from both sides and a transformation management team has been formed to drive the agenda.

What is needed now is structural reform and a transformation. So, I think there is no better time to do it. A new life of TPM.