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Malaysia needs big innovation purpose to stay ahead



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by SHAFIQQUL ALIFF / pic by BERNAMA

MALAYSIA needs a big innovation purpose and to be clear as to what innovation areas to work on which the country can offer on the world stage, says Cancer Research Malaysia chief scientist officer Prof Datin Paduka Dr Teo Soo-Hwang.

She said this critical infrastructure to enable success in commercialisation is not yet fully developed in Malaysia and many of the world's most esteemed education institutions not only have great academic units, but also commercialisation units, expertise, and funding that enable them to commercialise their research.

"It is this confluence of manpower and funding that we need in Malaysia. We and other research institutions have already shown that we can produce cutting edge research, some of which is ready for commercialisation, but we need more support to commercialise," she said.

"What do we do well above the rest that will allow us to stand out? For example, Cancer Research Malaysia has focused on research in Asians, and in that way, we have brought a value proposition to an international platform — it is clear that we need to continue to be clear about how we are unique and excel in these areas," she added.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Research Accelerator for Technology and Innovation (MRANTI) in a statement said a synergised ecosystem and a “bridge” between research and commercialisation are among the elements needed for Malaysia to pull ahead in the region and achieve its ambition to be among the Top 20 most innovative nations by 2030 in the Global Innovation Index.

In the first of a series of industry discussions aimed at fostering tighter synergy in the ecosystem, initiated by MRANTI, panel experts say that Malaysia has incredible potential, but it needs tighter collaboration within the innovation ecosystem that will support its success.

Furthermore, a strong technology transfer office mechanism between academia, government and investors to accelerate innovation to commercialisation is needed.

Malaysia is currently ranked 36th, and correspondingly, GDP growth is currently significantly lower than its potential output level with a gap of 49%.

MRANTI CEO Dzuleira Abu Bakar (*picture*) said as much as 80% of research in Malaysia today is being conducted in their Higher Learning Institution, just over 9,000 patent applications were made in Malaysia between 2013 and 2022 based on the World Intellectual Property Organisation data.

She said, however, this is a fraction of the 120,000 research publications Malaysia has produced in the same period.

“To be absolutely candid, our ecosystem is still fragmented. Our Return on Ideas, or ROI, is not yet where it should be. This is why we need to ask ourselves some hard questions: Why aren’t we innovating enough? And, even though we have so much talent, the private sector is still not investing enough in R&D — why?”

“As an ecosystem, we have come a long way, but there’s so much more that needs to be done. True innovative spirit most cannot be unleashed by an inaccessible and fragmented ecosystem. Lack of funding access, limited resources including skilled talent, and policies that have yet to catch up to potential are just a few of the many areas that need to be urgently addressed,” she said.

Dzuleira added that MRANTI is working to be that connector between the various stakeholders in the ecosystem, functioning as a single platform, or “glue” between the key players in the ecosystem.

She said that they connect problem statements with solutions, bridging collaboration between public and private sectors to increase private sector participation, either through market access, investment, advisory, or consultation and facilities for testing and prototyping.

“This is one of many more engagement sessions with the ecosystem. We will drive continuous innovation, and be the one-stop research commercialisation agency with the resources to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative ideas and concepts to impact,” she said.

“MRANTI will also connect researchers to the industry, and in doing so, ramp up the number of research or innovations that can be commercialised and will also be

working closely with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Information and the Economic Planning Unit with the vision to play a critical role in bringing together the private and public sectors.

“However, MRANTI’s mandate is not a silver bullet. Instead, what will truly be the ingredient for success is consistent, persistent, and structured engagement among all stakeholders, so that everyone is united in this journey towards commercialisation,” she said.

According to the Malaysia Knowledge Economy Study, every 1% increase in innovation capacity increases a country’s GDP per capita by 0.36% and for Malaysia, an increase in innovation production could translate to US\$1.21 billion (RM5.06 billion) additional to the country GDP of US\$336 billion, even as the 12th Malaysia Plan has outlined innovation as a key enabler in economic growth.