

'Malaysia needs innovation czar'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Every Malaysian, from scientist to layman, must be made aware of the importance of innovation, which will create new opportunities, employment and prosperity, said an international capability-building expert.

Dr Harold J. Raveche, president of the private US-based Stevens Institute of Technology, said this national mandate must be driven home in particular to engineers, scientists and innovators, as well as wealthy Malaysians to provide investment capital.

He said Prime Minister Da-tuk Seri Najib Razak, as a former defence minister, had the background knowledge of the importance of innovation in today's world.

He said the 1Malaysia concept fitted well into this innovation agenda, tapping the talent base of Malaysians.

"Talent is just not in one culture. Malaysia will find its way through its distinctive cultures."

He said the country needed an innovation czar to steer and fast-track the agenda to move up the ladder to a high-income economy, he said.

The candidate for the job need not be a technocrat, but someone who had the passion for innovation as well as integrity and commitment.

"You need a Formula One driver, not a taxi driver."

Raveche is here at the invitation of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Forbes Magazine ranked Stevens Institute of Technology, which houses two US national research centres of excellence, No. 3 in the US for return on investment from campus research last year.

Commenting on the government's focus on a new economic model centred on innovation and high value to generate high income, he said innovation was not only about doing something new, but also to extract new values that would benefit the country and investors.

On Malaysia's 21st ranking out of 110 countries on the Global Innovation Index, he said the country could progress by searching for and investing in promising individuals and high-tech enterprises.

This means backing them in research and development, starting partnerships with the country's four research universities and growing new enterprises as model examples.

The four universities are Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

For capacity building, Raveche said intellectual property protection was a must to draw investors. And education policies should include incentives for universities to undertake research and development. -- Bernama

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