

Joining Forces

Johan Mahmood Merican, Chief Executive Officer of Talent Corporation Malaysia, is hopeful that the public and private sectors can work together to address the nation's talent needs.

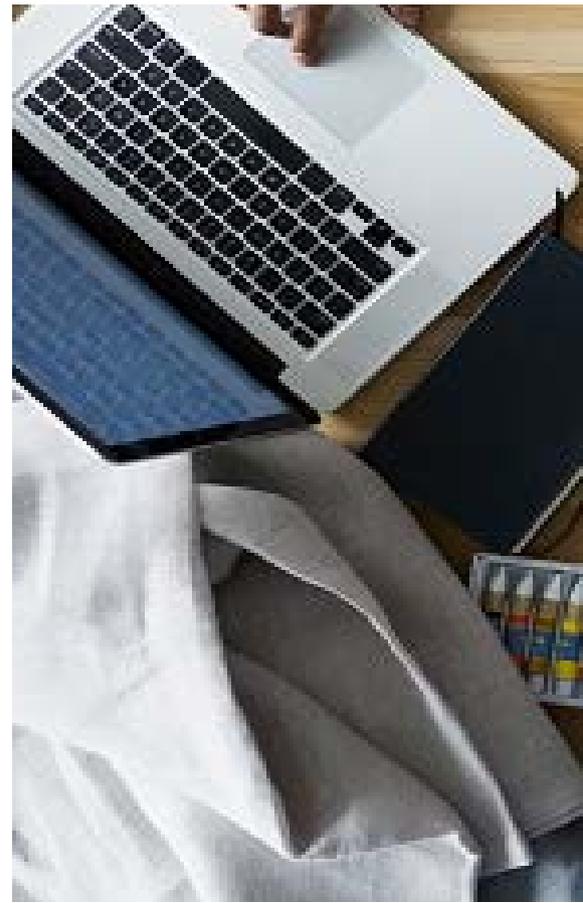
I KNOW OF A YOUNG TEACHER WHO, every morning, questions her decision to teach in an ordinary school in a town north of Malaysia, a town just like any other in Malaysia, dotted with motorcycle workshops, *kopitiams* and family-owned sundry shops. Like in most small towns, Alina's students mainly come from single income households, with fathers working as odd-job workers or labourers. Alina faces a daily challenge to motivate her students to want to learn and aspire beyond the jobs they see around them. Yet, she continues to persevere.

Alina's journey to that ordinary school is extraordinary. An actuarial graduate from the University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign, Alina could have easily remained in her job at an international consulting firm. However, after a year in the corporate world, she swapped her comfortable urban lifestyle for a tiny public housing flat up north because she, like others who have joined Teach for Malaysia (TFM), want to contribute to a better Malaysia, even if it is one student at a time.

I start my story with Alina's tale because individuals like her make a difference to Malaysia where it really matters, and that is to deliver talent for Malaysia's success. TalentCorp was happy to recognise TFM for Best Graduate Programme 2015, acknowledging that beyond helping young Malaysians in schools, TFM is also attracting top young Malaysian graduates and nurturing them to be future leaders. It is individuals like Alina and organisations like TFM that motivate our work at TalentCorp and fuel our hope for a better Malaysia.



Johan Mahmood Merican has been the CEO of TalentCorp since its establishment on 1 January 2011. An Economics graduate from the University of Cambridge, he has 20 years of experience in policy development, corporate finance, and accountancy in both the public and private sectors in Malaysia and the UK.



To succeed as a nation, we need a sustainable pipeline of talent of the right quantity and quality. Towards that, TalentCorp focuses on building partnerships to advance the national talent agenda, particularly:

- *Enhancing the employability of Malaysian graduates,*
- *Engaging global Malaysians to return or contribute from abroad,*
- *Facilitating top foreign talent, particularly in areas of skill shortages,*
- *Optimising homegrown Malaysian professionals, including promoting diversity and inclusion.*

As despairing as the challenges in the talent space may seem, we continue to be encouraged by the many selfless individuals and enlightened organisations who choose to make a difference. Sometimes, they are not even Malaysians! One such example is Chris Kelly, holder of TalentCorp's Residence Pass – Talent, who heads the Design Centre of Intel Malaysia. I've met precious few individuals who are as passionate as Chris in personally marketing Malaysia as a destination for talent and in nurturing young Malaysian engineers to become globally competitive. TalentCorp has been happy collaborating with multinationals like Intel to upskill the future generation of Malaysian design engineers.



GETTY IMAGES

Like Alina, there are days when I question whether what we're doing here at TalentCorp will make a difference and effectively address the challenges that Malaysia faces. Working on our own, we may not be able to. But as Rumi says, we are not a drop in the ocean, we are the ocean in a drop.

For just about any talent issue, I believe that we in Malaysia have the solutions. The key is whether we have the self-belief to try and whether we are able to put our differences aside to work together. Good examples include where competitors have been able to come together to nurture industry talent, such as the banking industry's FSTEP programme, oil and gas' PRODIGY and the electronics sector's FasTrack programme. We have certainly seen some encouraging results of employers acting in concert with the public sector to advance the nation's talent agenda.

I continue to be pleasantly surprised by the progressive initiatives by Malaysian-owned organisations. TalentCorp has worked on promoting diversity and inclusion with construction giant Gamuda Berhad. Beyond actively seeking to enhance the gender and ethnic mix of its workforce, not many know that Gamuda has started recruiting individuals with autism under their Project Differently-Abled (DA). Started in 2013, Project DA gathers volunteers from

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among Gamuda's staff who act as buddies, supervisors and guardians to ensure that their DA colleagues adjust well to their work environment. Today, the volunteers are encouraging Gamuda to do more and recruit more differently-abled employees. Readers should try eating at Menara Gamuda for lunch at the café called DIB, which stands for Deaf in Business, as the restaurant is run by hearing impaired individuals.

Beyond progressive employers, it still comes down to individuals to drive change by choosing to make a difference. One such change agent is Dr John Chan, the Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon at the Sarawak General Hospital. An award-winning surgeon and research expert in cardiology, Dr Chan had worked in England for more than 20 years before he returned to Malaysia under the Returning Expert Programme, to strengthen the hospital's newly-opened Heart Centre in Kuching. The hospital was well equipped with a full team of

anaesthetists, cardiologists and nurses, but had only one consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at that time and hundreds of patients waiting a very long time for critical heart and lung operations.

People say that the more hope you have, the more you can see your future. It's certainly true for Alina's schoolchildren, who today can imagine a different future in a much wider world. Dr Chan's many patients are also assured of a better future in the hands of a world-class surgeon, and Gamuda's Project DA gives hope to individuals with autism who, before this, may not have been able to imagine a future where they could be gainfully employed in Corporate Malaysia. Like them, I want to see Malaysia reach her potential. We truly have a lot going for us – resources, stability and great talent. We, therefore, should be a great country. However, it would require us to be pulling in the same direction. Whether we succeed as a nation, it is up to us.