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Personality



By Edwin Yapp

If there is one man who is qualified to head research and development agency, MIMOS Bhd, it is Dato' Abdul Wahab Abdullah. After all, how many homegrown executives can claim the accolade of being the first Malaysian to have led a world-class multinational corporation - the Motorola Malaysia R&D Centre, Penang - for 13 years?

Abdul Wahab, a self-confessed electronic hobbyist from his school days in Penang, reveals he first got interested in engineering and electronics by dabbling in gadgets such as transistors and resistors, and other electrical-related devices in his youth.

"After my secondary education in Jelutong Secondary School and Trade School in Penang, I worked in the steel pipe industry as an electrician repairing and maintaining horizontal cranes and switch gears.

"Following that, I went to Ungku Omar Polytechnic in Ipoh, under a sponsorship from Malaysian Tobacco Company and worked in Hewlett-Packard as a technician for a short time. I finally pursued a degree in Electrical Engineering at University of Malaya as a Motorola scholar," he shares.

Blessed by years of experience in one of the most well-known technology icons in the business, Dato' Abdul Wahab Abdullah today seeks to give back to the country through his contribution at MIMOS Bhd



Doing it his way

Pre-MIMOS **Stint**

Prior to joining MIMOS in July 2006, Abdul Wahab was the senior director of R&D operations, Global Technology Development Group, Motorola Technology Sdn Bhd.

"I was one of the pioneers who set up Motorola Malaysia's R&D Centre in Penang in 1979 and am proud to have been the first Malaysian to have led this facility in 1993.

"Today, Motorola Malaysia's R&D Centre is a full-blown R&D outfit with a comprehensive set of capabilities ranging from the conceptual stage of industrial design to development, testing, final manufacture and distribution and support," he says.

While working at Motorola, Abdul Wahab also helped set up Motorola's Asia Pacific Customer Solutions Centre, which today serves Motorola's customers across Asia Pacific.

"The Centre in Penang is one of Motorola's three centres worldwide providing critical support and system development for customers such as Malaysia's Express Rail Link, Korea National Police, Shanghai Police and Singapore Mass Rapid Transit.

"Having seen the Asia Pacific Design Centre grow from a team of 10 when it first started to 60 when I took over in 1993, and then to become a world-class Design Centre for the worldwide market in the last three years, with more than 1,000 engineers now is testament to the fact that Malaysians have the capability to excel," he declares proudly.



Leading **MIMOS**

Today, Abdul Wahab is tasked with a challenging goal of steering MIMOS into a premier applied research centre in frontier technologies for Malaysia. Additionally, he is also tasked to develop solutions and technologies to enhance customer value and create globally competitive indigenous industries.

"My day-to-day function also includes being hands-on in the applied research laboratories in my efforts to develop my people," he says.

While these goals are no doubt challenging, Abdul Wahab remains unperturbed in what he faces as he firmly believes the 27 years he spent at Motorola will help him in his quest to take MIMOS forward.

"Working in Motorola for about three decades has given me the confidence that Malaysians are on par, if not better, with engineer-

ing talents around the world. I am also capitalising on my experience, knowledge and expertise gained from developing Motorola's world-class multinational R&D Innovation Centre, bringing with me its corporate values and culture.

"It is a good fit where I am able to combine my passion in R&D and at the same time to give MIMOS a new lease of life in my effort to steer MIMOS into the premier applied research centre in frontier technologies."

Abdul Wahab also says he believes the key to making Malaysia recognised as an applied research nation and to succeed at the global stage is to push the envelope on intellectual property (IP).

"IP is crucial if Malaysia is to be recognised as the inventor of technology and not just a user of technology. For me, I want to see IP outputs increase significantly for MIMOS and Malaysia.

"As such, in our efforts to steer MIMOS into the premier applied research centre in frontier technologies, our focus lies in innovation and patents. Towards this end, I have made IP generation a key performance indicator (KPI) for all MIMOS employees and designed an IP reward scheme for MIMOS."

Management style **and philosophy**

On his management style, Abdul Wahab says most importantly, a person must put passion into his/her work.

"One must be a mental warrior, that is, to accept challenges and try new things. Always attempt what others don't think is possible. Also, I believe in putting the right people in the right places so that they will be self-motivated. Last year, I spent a lot of time developing my people, whom I believe is MIMOS' most important asset, into 'mental warriors'.

"I have an open-door policy and encourage my people to challenge me. I have regular tea talks with my staff and quarterly 'town hall' meetings. It's crucial that I integrate with my people and build character among all of them at all levels in the organisation," he says.

Abdul Wahab says one of the best things about his job is to develop his charges and see them grow into leaders.

"There is nothing more satisfying than seeing the seeds that we sow bear fruit in the form of individuals who are eager to pursue goals to meet the MIMOS vision of making MIMOS into the premier applied research centre in frontier technologies. The thought of producing next generation leaders fills me with pride," he says.

When Abdul Wahab is not hard at work in MIMOS, he enjoys spending his free time at his durian orchard in Kulim, although these days he does not have the luxury of spending as much time as he would like to.

"I don't like to stay quiet; I am passionate about carpentry and gardening. For me, there is no free time, there is only fun time," he exclaims.

Does he hold any philosophy in life? Says Abdul Wahab: "To me, if you lose your character, you lose everything. You must have your own distinct character that is backed with the highest regard for integrity and respect for people. This is the key philosophy that has always been my guiding light.

"Also, there are no shortcuts in life and I am blessed to have gone through my life meeting a whole spectrum of people throughout my involvement with the community as well as in my career. At the end of the day, I believe that you need to be yourself and whatever you do, ensure it is from the heart and with passion."