Thinking and learning together

MUHAMMAD Nurazli Rizali, a business development manager with Time Publications Sdn Bhd, beams whenever he talks about his experience participating in the 30th IATSS (International Association of Traffic and Safety Sciences) Forum held in Suzuka, Japan last September.

To the 28-year-old, IATSS Forum is like a crash Master’s programme in social studies.

“Not only was I exposed to a broad range of issues pertaining to Japan, I also learnt how to manage conflict between members in my study group. It was a really good experience for me,” he says.

Muhammad Nurazli is one of 145 Malaysians who have taken part in the programme since 1983.

Organised by Honda Motor Co Ltd’s International Association of Traffic and Safety Sciences in Suzuka, IATSS Forum was the brainchild of Honda’s former president Soichiro Honda.

The programme promotes “thinking and learning together” through an extensive study course which includes lectures on science and technology, industrial management, education and cultural and study trips as well as home stay activities.

To date, more than 600 professionals from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines have attended the forum.

Yet, few young Malaysian executives are interested in applying for this unique fellowship.

IATSS Forum Malaysia National Committee chairman Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Ahmad Nawawi Aing says that response to the programme has been poor.

“We have lots of requests for application forms but very few return them. Maybe only between 30 and 40 people do,” says Ahmad Nawawi.

Muhammad Nurazli notices the lack of interest among young professionals at the forum for shortlisted IATSS Forum candidates two years ago.

“IATSS Forum is meant for top young professionals in Asia, so I expected to see those from multinational and transnational corporations there. But there were none,” says the Cambridge University graduate.

Ahmad Nawawi attributes the lukewarm feedback to the difficulty most young workers experience in getting leave for eight weeks to attend the forum.

Several former participants have had to resign from their jobs to go on this course.

Considering the competitive nature of the corporate world, it is also possible that the young executives themselves do not want to postpone their careers, says Muhammad Nurazli.

However, Rabbitkin KIMO business development director Kao Chee Ming thinks it is a risk worth taking.

Kao says, “I have always wanted to represent Malaysia in an event with an inter-cultural exchange setting. My employer thought I was crazy for risking my promotion as the youngest branch manager at the time.”

“But the experience gave me self-confidence and fulfillment.”

To University of Malaya lecturer Dr Siti Nurshieena Mahid Zain, IATSS Forum has advanced her understanding of the Japanese.

“I now realise their perspectives and insights, which give me an upper hand when dealing with them in my work,” she says.

She has also adopted some Japanese traits such as punctuality and neatness.

“I am the current president of the Malaysian IATSS Forum alumni association,” says Siti Nurshieena.

IATSS Forum, now in its 21st year, is still relevant today, says knowledge management specialist Che Tee.

“We all talk about managing and working across borders. IATSS Forum offers real insights into various cultures and work styles, all within 55 days,” says Tee.

“Many young Malaysian degree holders have never left the country. They miss out on the interaction with people from other cultures, which is what gives them the competitive edge in their careers,” adds the 25th IATSS Forum participant.

Tee’s sentiments are...