

## FLUENCY BEYOND ONE LANGUAGE

WHILE English mastery is crucial, students must not neglect the importance of developing proficiency in other languages, say the Star Education Fund's partners-in-education.

Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology president Prof Datuk Dr Lee Sze Wei said in today's borderless economy, multilingualism is no longer just an advantage but a strategic necessity. "Being multilingual – proficient in Bahasa Malaysia (BM), English and other languages such as Mandarin or Tamil – adds a layer of cultural intelligence that is invaluable.

"In management, the ability to switch languages allows for better negotiation and relationship-building across diverse markets.

"In technology, while the 'code' may be in English, communicating solutions to a global clientele requires linguistic flexibility," he said, adding that multilingualism allows graduates to be highly versatile and resilient in their careers.

Heriot-Watt University Malaysia provost and chief executive officer Prof Mushtak Al-Atabi said mastering language is a key 21st-century need. "Multilingualism signals more than technical ability. It reflects cognitive flexibility, critical thinking and intercultural competence – qualities that employers value highly at a time when artificial intelligence is disrupting the

job market," he said.

He added that proficiency in multiple languages opens doors to broader academic pathways and wider career opportunities.

"As overseas work, regional collaboration and cross-border business become more common, employers increasingly seek talent capable of supporting expansion beyond national borders.

"Moreover, as Malaysia transitions towards becoming a high-income economy, the demand for multilingual graduates will only grow. Multinational and global companies require professionals who understand international standards, adapt to global business practices, and engage confidently with partners from diverse cultural backgrounds," he said, adding that by mastering English as a professional tool while honouring their diverse heritage dialects, Malaysian graduates can become the most versatile talent in the Asean region.

Oriental Nilam College of Nursing and Health Sciences chief executive cum principal Kathy Yu said in nursing, being multilingual is not just critical but highly beneficial.

"Nurses who can speak BM, English and other languages are better able to communicate with patients. Therefore, multilingual nurses have better job opportunities, stronger communication skills and greater adaptability in both local and international healthcare environments," she said. — By ROWENA CHUA