LOOKING back over the many decades since the 1966 visit by United States president Lyndon B. Johnson, American and Malaysian ties have been profound.

Their educational partnership began in the 1960s. The American support was experienced by most of us, who pursued our studies in the US via the Malaysian American Commission on Educational Exchange.

Back then, the relationship was tied historically when Universiti Teknologi Mara, or UiTM (then known as ITM), established a partnership with Ohio University in 1968.

The Tun Abdul Razak Chair — named in honour of the second prime minister — was a collaboration aimed at teaching, conducting research and performing outreach programmes for Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Current Tun Abdul Razak Chair holder Professor Dr Habibah Ashari of UiTM is the 14th in the line. She is the second woman to hold the post. The first holder was Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

Via the Chair, Bahasa Malaysia was offered for the first time at Ohio University. It has established a Malaysian resource centre to promote information about Malaysia, with books and studies on the country and her culture.

Another educational diversity programme was the teacher exchange programme between the US and Malaysia. American education has produced Nobel Prize winners. Drawing on this, another collaborative programme sees our academics being sent for post-doctorate training at American Nobel Laureates’ labs.

UiTM hosted Nobel Laureate Ferid Murad in 2012. A fruitful hosting indeed, and the university is collaborating for training under Noble Laureate tutelage, one of which will be at George Washington University.

Sending our brightest to carry out research with a Nobel Prize winner is an expensive endeavour, but we sow in the spring to reap in the autumn.

Megawati Omar,
Academy of Language Studies,
Shah Alam, Selangor