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Limkokwing the university of choice

MALAYSIA is well on the road to becoming a world-class centre of educational excellence, according to educationist Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing.

With some 20,000 foreign students already in the country and strong indications that the figure could rise to about 50,000 in two years, Malaysia would then be a world educational centre.

"We should then thank Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Government for this," said Lim, who is president of Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology.

"We work in support of what our Government wants to do. Our PM's vision is for Malaysia to become a centre of educational excellence. So we go to various parts of the world to promote ourselves. The PM is well-known in the world and people trust him, and that has helped."

Lim, who is also president of the Malaysian Education Promotion Council, was optimistic Malaysia would do well in attracting more foreign students.

"Malaysia will be a country of choice. In the long run, foreign students will come here because of the quality, not because we are more affordable."

He said the fact that a local Chinese brandname such as Limkokwing could draw international students was proof that it was quality that wins the day.

"Limkokwing is a local name but that does not stop foreign students from coming here. People are not complaining about it being a Chinese name. It's about quality. With degree programmes that are good, if not better, we would compete with Australian and UK universities," he said.

About a quarter of Limkokwing's 4,000 students are foreigners.

Winning the Ministry of International Trade & Industry's Export Excellence Award in February confirms its success in attracting foreign students.

He acknowledged the existence of the perception that a degree earned overseas is above a locally-gained one but believed this was set to change. "Success," he said, "lies in providing innovative programmes".

He said compared with its Western counterparts, Malaysia had an advantage in that it could introduce programmes suitable for developing countries whereas their programmes were for the Western world.

"We are a latecomer compared with traditional destinations like the UK, US, Canada and Australia but we can be successful because we are a developing country, so we can tailor courses for other developing countries.

"As soon as we get this message across, we will do well in the international educational scene. We can introduce more programmes at degree level which you won't get in other countries. We can even tailor master's programmes for developing countries.

On Limkokwing's part, it will introduce programmes in multimedia, architecture and communications, design and video games, virtual reality, creative industries and the performing arts.

"These are programmes not easily found in Western universities. We will also introduce such programmes as hair design, footwear design and retail marketing in our fashion and retail school," he said.

"Having more foreign students in our midst is a positive development and it is good for Malaysian students as they would get to learn from young people from other countries. You learn more when you have friends from

different countries. "It's good for the people, good for the country ... as more Malaysians would be able to gain a university education."

He said the new status had not only given Limkokwing a boost but more flexibility.

"We will get to introduce our own programmes. It allows us to be less expensive than 3+0 (degree programmes) and our degrees are internationally recognised."

Ensuring quality control towards this end is a consortium of partner universities from the UK, Australia and New Zealand (ICPU).

There is also the International Quality Assurance Board (IQAB) comprising representatives of partner universities. The board moderates and validates programmes.

In line with its move to Cyberjaya later this year to assume the role of education and training partner of the Malaysia Design Technology Centre, it has established an R&D centre to work with industries and its university partners.

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