

Why not make better use of Tanjung Malim facility?

NST- 16/5/2007

THE education minister has announced the setting up of a teachers training institute at Nilai ("RM1.3 billion education complex to be built in Nilai" — NST, May 5).

While supporting the idea of empowering teachers and the need for retraining them to improve teaching skills, I question the rationale to reinvent the wheel.

In 1995, the Teachers Training Division presented a paper to the education minister to establish a university for teachers by converting Institut Perguruan Sultan Idris in Tanjung Malim into a full-fledged university for teachers.

The paper made a strong case for the university to become a one-stop training institution for teachers, making pedagogy its core business.

The cabinet then approved the establishment of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) in 1997. Lest the public is confused, today's UPSI was formerly Sultan Idris Training

College in Tanjung Malim that the British built in 1921 to train teachers for Malay schools.

To its credit, throughout the years, UPSI became renowned for producing teachers for schools. It is the biggest university (more than 13,000 students) in teacher training. Conscious of space limitations (80ha), UPSI paid RM300 million to acquire 320ha in Behrang Ulu, a few kilometres from the present site.

In October 2006, the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department approved a partial budget (RM233 million) for the construction of a new campus in Behrang Ulu under the 9th Malaysia Plan. When completed, the new UPSI (RM1 billion) can take on more than 20,000 trainee teachers.

UPSI has the facilities and manpower to become the main teachers training centre in Malaysia. The other 27 teachers colleges in the coun-

try should work with UPSI and be accountable to the Education Ministry.

The concern over UPSI being under the Ministry of Higher Education and out of reach of the Ministry of Education is unfounded. The administrative problem can be resolved by the Education Ministry without cabinet intervention.

Placing UPSI under the Education Ministry makes plenty of sense. I can think of 10 reasons. First, UPSI supplies teachers for schools. Second, UPSI has the experience in teacher training that goes back to 1921.

Third, it has the manpower, including heavyweights in pedagogy training, on campus.

Four, the IT, library and other supporting facilities and amenities are excellent and its field is considered among the best in the country.

Five, about 60 per cent of students are housed in hostels around the campus on rental basis.

Six, it will save money for the nation. The money for the Nilai Education Centre could be used for other purposes.

Seven, the expansion of UPSI campus has been approved under the 8th Malaysia Plan and it is under construction.

Eight, the Ministry of Education can start empowering teachers immediately. The Nilai Education Complex may take years to complete.

Nine, UPSI has established a networking relationship in the Nusantara region that can be useful in this globalisation era.

Finally, no one can accuse the Education Ministry of empire-building if teacher training can be centralised at UPSI, rather than building a new complex.

The ministry does not need to reinvent the wheel; it only needs to oil the present machinery at UPSI to be productive and quality oriented.

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