

mb education

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Beyond Buildings

With the Ninth Malaysia Plan under way, we look at some of the issues affecting the higher education sector.

By Habhajan Singh



HIGHER Education Minister Datuk Mustapha Mohamed underwent a baptism of fire when handling the uproar on the ethnic relations guidebook recently. The verdict: he stumbled, only to regain composure and reclaim the plot as the issue progressed.

But the issue of the local university's guidebook will soon blow away. Mustapha and his team have many larger issues to handle in the months ahead.

Some of the issues on his plate are massaging the much-criticised Universities and University Colleges Act 1971, enhancing the standing of local universities and making real the attempts to translate the dream of making Malaysia a regional higher education hub.

With the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) now well under way, putting into action the points of the five-year blueprint is one key area. Get the strategy right and all things will fall in place. On the flip side, poor translation of the well-written plan – Malaysia has certainly produced many, many remarkable documents – will bring further disrepute.

With the fourth largest budget allocation under the five-year plan, the Ministry of Higher Education has much to do. Talking to ministry officials, *Malaysian Business* understands that the following are some of the areas of emphasis:

- Providing new infrastructure to present universities. For example, getting the new medical faculty up and running at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM).
- Building new universities and community colleges. Universiti Darul Iman, the nation's 18th university will be in Terengganu while fellow east-coast state Kelantan will get the 19th university slated to commence operations in October.
- Internationalisation of universities. Here, the authorities are encouraging serious collaboration with renowned foreign universities.
- Providing more space to universities.

Is there too much emphasis on infrastructure? Some educationists contacted by *Malaysian Business* have expressed concern that bricks and mortar will take precedence over quality.

'You need more than buildings to create a good education system. You need to put in place the proper systems and policies. At the moment, I see more emphasis on infrastructure,' says one of them.

Not so true, counter higher education officials. They say that infrastructure building is unavoidable due to growing demand for more higher education and also the changing education landscape.

At the same time, the officials say changes are already underway. They point to the recent appointment of two Vice Chancellors – at Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) – as examples. Datuk Rafiah Salim became the country's first woman VC when she was appointed to helm UM while National Accreditation Board (LAN) CEO Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah has been appointed VC at UKM. Both appointments were made by a committee, and not by the minister's dictate as in the past.

'This is a clear sign of cutting to size bureaucracy. We also want to give more freedom to the universities,' says a ministry official.

Standards

Another key area of concern amongst Ministry of Higher Education officials is bumping up university standards. The 9MP, released last March and covering the period between 2006 and 2010, reiterates the importance of producing tertiary institutions of international standing. The plan states in order to achieve the international standing, local institutions of higher education will be benchmarked against international standards and a rating system will be introduced.

'The institutions will also be required to conform to the standards for quality assurance procedures set out in the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). To support the implementation of the MQF and to establish a unified quality assurance system, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) will be set up in 2006,' the plan states.

Indeed, much work has been done in this area. The draft Bill for the MQA is now

Development Expenditure and allocation for education and training, 2001-2010 (RM 'million)

PROGRAMME	8MP EXPENDITURE	9MP ALLOCATION
Education	37,922	40,356.5
Pre-school	215.7	807.3
Primary Education	5,369.3	4,837.3
Secondary Education	8,748.1	6,792.8
Government & Government-aided Schools (Academic)	7,931.2	5,549.1
MARA Junior Science Colleges	433.1	614.5
Government & Government-aided Schools (Technical & Vocational)	383.8	629.2
Tertiary Education	13,403.9	16,069
Teacher Education	1,368.1	577.7
Other Educational Support Programmes	8,816.9	11,272.4
Training	4,450.9	4,792.6
Industrial Training	3,930.6	4,410.6
Commercial Training	158.6	179.5
Management Training	361.7	509.5
Total	42,372.9	42,149.1

Source: Economic Planning Unit

Accelerating Lifelong Learning

- Extracts from the Ninth Malaysia Plan

THE implementation of lifelong learning programmes will be accelerated to enable all segments of society to continuously learn and acquire knowledge and skills. Lifelong learning infrastructure, such as community colleges, will be expanded and upgraded. The use of schools and community centres for lifelong learning will also be encouraged. In addition, e-learning and distance education will be further promoted to increase accessibility.

In order to change the attitude

and mindset of individuals towards continuous learning, measures to inculcate a learning culture will be implemented at all levels of society.

Public institutions of higher education will establish centres for continuing education and continue to offer more places with flexible entry requirements up to 10% of intake at diploma and degree levels. The OUM and UNITAR will be encouraged to offer more programmes at masters and

Ph.D levels to cater to the needs of working people.

A National Council for Lifelong Learning will be established to provide policy direction and coordinate lifelong learning activities. Private education and training providers as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will also be encouraged to provide lifelong learning programmes. In addition, employers will be encouraged to promote lifelong learning among their employees.

ready, a significant milestone in the nation's higher education landscape.

The move will see the merger of the National Accreditation Board (LAN) and the Quality Assurance Division (QAD) under the Ministry. In a major departure from the past, the move will see a single system of quality assurance and reference point for all tertiary qualifications, be they public or private.

Second thrust

Enhancing standards and tweaking other areas of higher education comes under the second of the five thrusts of the 9MP.

With human capital development as a major thrust, greater focus will be given to holistic human capital development encompassing knowledge and skills, progressive attitude as well as strong moral and ethical values.

Here is where lifelong learning comes in.

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The Government plans to further expand it. The plan says: 'The inculcation of entrepreneurial values will be intensified to promote self-employment. Measures will be undertaken to upgrade S&T capabilities to drive innovation. Smart partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders in education, training and lifelong learning will be intensified.'

The 9MP also places importance on the quality of academic staff. The authorities are taking up the challenge of improving the standards through more staff development programmes. In addition, the number of staff with doctorate qualifications in public universities will be increased to achieve the target of 60% of total academic staff by 2010.

'In order to increase the quality and global outlook of universities and their academic staff, international engagements with renowned international institutions will be pursued, including through research collaborations,' the plan says.

The 9MP document reiterates the dream of making Malaysia a top choice for overseas students. It says: 'For educational-related services, we will double efforts to develop Malaysia as a regional centre for excellence in the provision of tertiary level education. We will promote and export tertiary education through strategic marketing efforts and the branding of educational products.'

What has been done thus far? The report says among measures taken included the implementation of a quality assurance system, promotional activities and the establishment of education promotion offices in Beijing, Dubai, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.

With these efforts, enrolment of foreign students in education institutions increased to 50,380 last year. Of this total, 82% were in institutions of higher education, mainly from East Asia and Pacific, followed by Asean countries.

Clearly, Mustapha and his team will have their hands full as they move forward. Educationists and the country are watching as higher education is close to the hearts of many people. **mb**