

# EDUCATION

## Any more room at our top?

Abandoning study abroad for study at home makes financial sense for students overseas, but can our own educational resources bear the strain of such a *balik kampung* move? RAHMAH DAUD and JESWANT KAUR examine the question

**T**HE depreciating ringgit has caused uncertainty among students abroad and many are considering packing their bags coming back to study in colleges or universities here.

But a question that keeps popping up is whether these institutions are well-enough equipped to handle the anticipated influx of students.

The two-day national education seminar on *Education for Global Competitiveness* organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI) in Petaling Jaya recently took a look at the issue and suggested alternative solutions to the problem.

Private colleges say that they can absorb students affected by the currency problems, but for the effort to be successful, there must be synergy between private colleges and the government.

Malaysian Association of Private Colleges (MAPCO) secretary-general Teo Chiang Liang said although the Education Ministry has assured that it would look into requests from colleges to conduct their 2+1 programmes (two years here, one year abroad) entirely here (3+0), no approvals have been forthcoming yet.

Besides the absence of clear-cut guidelines from the ministry, the National Accreditation Council has not yet given its requirements to private colleges wishing to



**TEO:** No approval yet for 3+0 programmes



**WAN SULAIMAN:** Build Education parks



**DR SULAIMAN:** Heavier load on academic staff

The financial viability of delivering foreign programmes locally is also a problem as conditions imposed by foreign institutions may be too costly to meet.

The reluctance of banks to finance private colleges in their expansion plans is hampering their efforts to take in more students. Local universities are already bursting at the seams and any further increase in student intake would have an adverse effect on the quality of campus life.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development) of Universiti Utara Malaysia Dr Sulaiman Mahbob said the university has already imposed a 30 per cent increase in teaching load on its academic staff.

"We have no choice but to ask lecturers to put in extra teaching hours because of the increased number of students. Hostel accommodation is in a sardine situation with up to four students crammed into one room. To overcome these problems, there is a need to increase off-campus programmes with distance learning through greater use of IT and networking in the form of twinning and franchising."



**SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS:** Looking for solutions to possible problems due to students returning from abroad

Professor Wan Sulaiman Wan Harun of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), said the creation of education parks would increase the accessibility and affordability of tertiary education.

State governments would provide the land while infrastructural development would be taken care of by the private sector. Facilities should include a library, computer centre, residences, food services, recreational facilities, classrooms, laboratories and office space to be rented out to education service providers and private colleges.

He has suggested that the parks be established in strategic locations throughout the country with equity participation from state governments, public universities and the private sector.