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Colleges Told To Attract More Foreign Students

NILAI, Aug 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has urged the private sector to complement the government's efforts to make Malaysia a regional hub for education by attracting more foreign students to study in the country.

The Deputy Prime Minister said judging from the sizeable population of international students in local institutions of higher learning, the country was on track to achieving this objective.

"A recent survey conducted by an education publication reveals that between the end of 1999 and 2000 there were about 23,000 students from more than 115 countries studying in Malaysia," he said in his speech at the opening of Inti College Malaysia campus here on Thursday.

Of this figure, 11,000 were in private tertiary institutions, he said in his speech which was read out by Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid.

Foreign students in local private tertiary institutions currently number between 12,000 and 15,000, he said.

He commended Inti College for having attracted over 2,200 international students to its five campuses, the biggest number of international students found in any local private tertiary institution.

He urged other institutions of higher learning to emulate Inti's student-focused efforts.

"I am impressed by Inti's ongoing initiatives to offer quality market-driven programmes and to install sophisticated infrastructure aimed at enhancing the learning process, through familiarity with information and communications technology," he said.

Abdullah said the government regarded education as central to national development, and the emphasis placed on education was geared towards the creation of a progressive society.

Concerted steps were continuously taken to widen the people's access to education, he said.

"We have noticed that Malaysia's growth and prosperity over the years can be largely attributed to our continued investment in education. Indeed, the current 8th Malaysia Plan has set aside RM22.66 billion for both education and training, while the previous plan had allocated RM20.19 billion," he said.

Abdullah said education was the cornerstone of the country's vision to achieve developed status by 2020 as it would equip the people with knowledge and skills to enhance productivity and competitiveness.

"The magnitude of the task is that much greater, given that the demographics of Malaysia is such that about 52 per cent of the population is below 25, with nine million people or 20 per cent below 18 years of age.