

of INTI College, as Tan would sum it up, is about passion and vision. 'The past 15 years have been quite smooth sailing,' he says. 'I've had a good management team with a common vision and when you stop differences at the vision level, it's very easy to solve problems.'

Tan's passion for education is evident. His speech is peppered with taglines and philosophies on the importance of investing in education. The name 'INTI', he says, is a Malay word with Sanskrit roots meaning 'essence'. 'Education is meant to bring out the innermost talent and strength of a person, the good in there.'

'We're in an industry with a conscience,' he stresses. 'We're not in a business of manufacturing a product or a commodity. In this industry, every "malfunction" has a social cost to it. While "hardware", the infrastructure and facilities, is a prerequisite for any education institution, the "software", the human asset, is the most important.'

College life, for Tan, is also more than just academics. Tan, who was captain of the table-tennis team in his university, is a firm believer in student activities. 'We emphasise on providing a holistic education, which encourages students to be active in co-curricular activities, such as sports and social work.' The local campuses have some 50 clubs and societies and have begun giving scholarships to top sportsmen.

'Mr Tan struck me as one who's so keen to promote education,' notes ex-Cabinet Minister Tengku Tan Sri Ahmad Rithauddeen, who is now chairman of the board of honorary advisors of INTI College. 'At the beginning, it was tough to get things going, but the college has done so well and is so recognised that students keep coming.'

Agrees Eddy Chieng, incoming chapter chairman of the Young Presidents' Organisation, 'He (Tan) is aware that he's in an industry that shapes the future leaders of the country. He's able to put his heart, passion and money where his mouth is.'

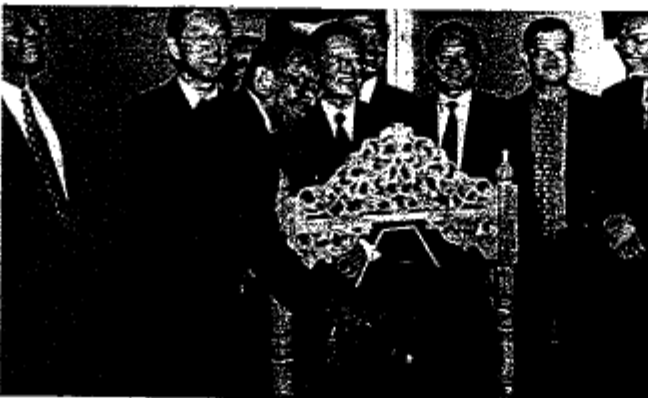
The visionary in Tan sprang into action when he embarked on building the college's main campus in Nilai, then a remote piece of land south of the Klang Valley. He invested some RM150 million on the 82-acre site, with facilities such as an Olympic-size swimming pool, hostels, a hairdressing salon and squash and basketball courts.

'At that time, people said "Who would

want to go there?"' Tan says. This, he points out, was before the KL International Airport and other southern-corridor landmarks were set up. 'We've proven them wrong.' Four years down the road, INTI College Malaysia has a bustling student population of some 6,000.

'Tan comes across as someone who knows what he's doing,' says Chieng. 'He walks the talk and puts his vision into action. All the things he spoke about have come into fruition.'

INTI's inroads into the overseas markets are also testament to Tan's farsightedness. INTI's educational wing Beijing INTI Management College was established as early as 1993, one of the earliest formal educational



INTI Universal Holdings' transfer to the main board of the KLSE in 2000

ties between both countries. 'We've been exploring China for many years, waiting for the market to be ready,' Tan says. 'Now that the Chinese Government is sympathetic toward private colleges, it's time to move in.'

In preparation for globalisation, INTI has also moved toward e-learning and setting up franchise education institutions abroad, namely China, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia. Today, INTI has franchisees in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan and Xi'an. 'What Britain and America did for us 15 years ago, we're doing for these countries,' he says.

INTI is already known as a hub for international students, with some 2,000 students from 38 different countries. 'To be an internationalised campus is more than bringing in international students; we have to create a welcoming environment for them, to look at them as an asset. The college has put in a lot of resources to cultivate a global mentality at our campuses.'

The college has certainly grown by leaps and bounds since its listing on the second board of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange

in 1996. It transferred to the main board in October 2000. 'I was hesitant at first (to list),' says Tan. 'I had to think of the implications and sensitivities involved when we were listed. It was a mental hurdle to overcome.'

'Thinking back, it was the right move to go public,' he continues. 'When we're listed, we have enough public funds to do a job worth doing. Now, as we move internationally, with a listed company vehicle, we're able to work better as foreign countries and investors have more confidence in us.'

For the financial year ended Dec 31, 2002, the company turned in a pre-tax profit of RM25.12 million on a turnover of RM142.62 million.

Even though he has his hands full with college affairs, Tan still finds time to indulge in other activities. He's the chairperson of the Asean-China Economic Forum to be held in August, organised by the Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce. He's also involved in the Young Presidents' Organisation, school boards and various other social work ('to give back what we've gained'). He

keeps himself fit by jogging and playing table tennis twice a week, making him still a formidable challenge to some of the top players in INTI.

His four priorities in life, Tan says, are career, socialising, health and family. 'Money and name are just by-products,' he says. 'Everybody must try to balance their time.'

While he believes he has fared well overall, the father of five (aged between nine and 17) hopes he can spend more time with his family. 'I have to thank my wife, who also runs a language centre, for taking such good care of the family.'

After 16 years, Tan has a lot to look forward to. 'I seldom look back,' he says. 'It's a career worth my effort. The challenges and crises make your work more prominent. It gives me great satisfaction when successful people today come up to me and tell me that they studied at INTI.'

'Education is so exciting,' he says. 'Even if I live another 100 years, I still will not have enough time to do everything I want to do.' **mb**