

'Freeze' on foreign intake

No to students from SARS countries

PORT DICKSON: All private institutions of higher learning have been urged to stop taking in students from countries affected by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) with immediate effect.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin said the move was a temporary measure to stop the spread of the killer virus, which had claimed over 80 lives worldwide.

"We urge private colleges to stop taking in students from the affected countries for the time being until the problem is rectified by the health authorities over the next three or four months.

"We hope they will co-operate with us on this matter until the situation is no longer perceived as a threat," he told reporters after launching a workshop organised by the Federal Territory Puteri Umno's Public Complaints Bureau at a resort here on Friday.

He said there were no problems with foreign students already here but those travelling to and from their home countries must be quarantined upon their return.

The countries affected by SARS to date include China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam and Canada.

At the school level, Abdul Aziz said the ministry had issued a circular to headmasters and principals to monitor their students.

"If they come across students showing symptoms of SARS, they should immediately send them to the designated hospitals," he said.

In Petaling Jaya, Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities secretary-general Dr Lee Fah Onn said that although private colleges had yet to receive an official directive, they would comply with the request as the matter was serious.

"So far, colleges have only

received verbal instructions from the various state immigration departments.

"This precautionary measure is necessary. We have anticipated it," he said when contacted yesterday.

National Association of Private Education Institutions president Dr Mohd Talha Alithamby described the temporary "freeze" on entry of foreign students from affected countries as "not too worrying."

The bulk of foreign students, he said, came from China to study English language courses and they could return for the next main intake in July.

"By then everything should be all right," he said.

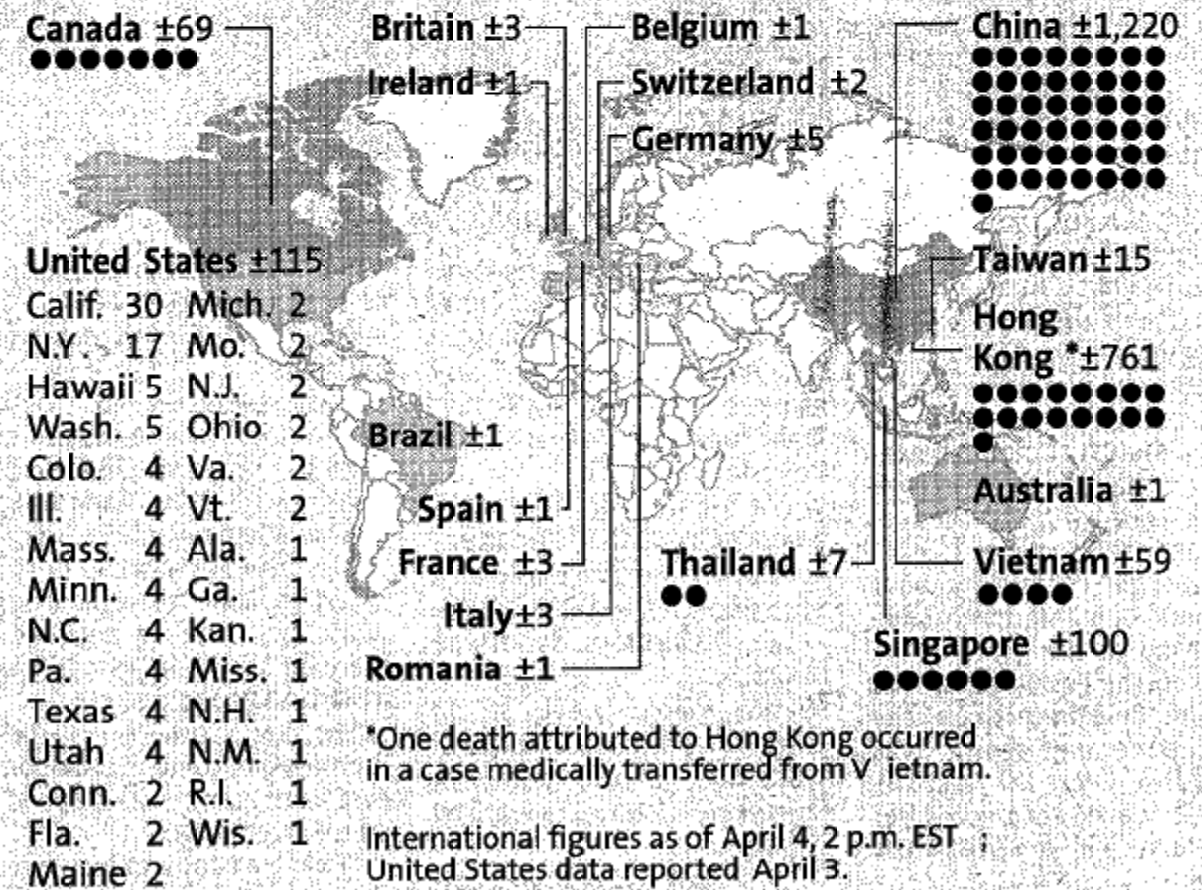
Malaysia currently has 11,058 students from China, 1,296 from Singapore, 497 from Taiwan, 337 from Vietnam, 146 from Canada and 35 from Hong Kong.

They comprise over 50% of the foreign student population in private higher educational institutions.

Health investigators study SARS in China

International health officials continue to investigate the origins of severe acute respiratory syndrome, SARS, in hopes of containing the global outbreak. At least 84 people have died and more than 2,300 are believed to be sick.

Number of reported SARS cases



MALAYSIAN SITUATION
(as at 6pm Apr 4)

- Suspected 74
- Quarantined N/A
- Death 1

Hotline: 03-26946394/03-26938053
Website: <http://dph.gov.my/sars>