

'Graduate links' proposed

Taib wants Unimas to initiate student exchange programmes with foreign universities

P.KHIDMAT MAKLUMAT AKADEMIK

UNIMAS



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Unimas. Kuvokanyer

SAMARAHAN: Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud yesterday asked Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) to forge graduate exchange programmes with renowned universities around the world.

While commending Unimas for its working relationship with these universities in various fields of research, he felt that the university, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, should try and expand its links to benefit its students further.

"The State government will support these programmes and we will help where we are needed," he said at the seventh convocation ceremony of the university here.

Responding to the Chief Minister's call later, Unimas Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Yusuf Hadi said that it was the university's aim to internationalise its students and he announced that the university would set up a Student Exchange Fund soon.

"This fund will enable Unimas students to gain more knowledge and experience and in turn it will also finance students who are sent by our partner universities.

"The presence of foreign exchange students in Unimas will internationalise our campus and this will give our students the opportunity to mix and interact with foreign students," he said.

Meanwhile, Taib said he hoped also to see Unimas' ground-breaking information and communication technology project, which was first conceived in Bario with 'E-Bario' and recently in Long Bedian, extended to other rural settlements.

"This project introduces ICT to the rural areas and it enables them to communicate with the outside world. I hope Unimas will consider connecting other areas like Mukah."

Taib was also pleased to highlight Unimas' offer of an education programme from next year onwards to train science and mathematics teachers as well as English teachers specifically for rural schools.

He pointed out that Unimas was now working together with the State government to offer scholarships to rural students for the programme. And once they graduated, he said they would be posted to schools in the rural areas as stated in their scholarship agreement.

Another area where the university was getting the support of the government, he said, was in virology research which had received international recognition recently for their work on the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

He said that the Health and Medical Institute of the university had also successfully developed vaccines for diseases like dengue, enterovirus 71, the Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Nipah.

"This institute, which works closely with other local and foreign institutions as well as multinational companies, have improved the standard of health of people in this country," said Taib.

In the 10 years since it opened its doors, Taib said 4,526 people had graduated, including 392 with the Masters degrees and three with PhDs. He said the research projects and consultancy services provided by the university had helped the country in various fields including in preparing the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report for development projects like the Bakun hydro electric project.

Such is the achievement of the university's academic staff, he said, that they had received various accolades both on the national and international stage for research, education and management. The university has been ISO 992 accredited, he said.

"As the first university to have been established since the launching of Vision 2020, Unimas strives to balance its role between the classic role of universities and its role in the development of human resources in fulfilling the country's aim to be an industrialised and developed nation," said Taib.

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