

STATE GOVT ALL OUT TO PROVIDE EASIER ACCESS TO EDUCATION — TAIB

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KUCHING: The state government is serious in bringing easier access to education in the state, including persuading several top notch overseas universities to set up a campus here.

Besides that, it also intends to open more universities especially in other areas like Mukah and Betong, said Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

This would make it easier and more convenient for parents to send their children to universities, he added.

Bearing in mind that one of the ways to get the poor out of the vicious poverty cycle is through education, he said the government was always on the lookout for ways and opportunities to develop the education sector to a higher level.

“By doing this, we hope university level studies which were once hard to reach in the past become an easier achievement for our community,” he said at the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) 20th graduation ceremony at the campus yesterday.

At the same time, he urged universities to look into restructuring existing curriculum and be ready to offer more technical courses to produce more manpower for the technical sector to meet the needs of Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).

Noting that the semi-manufactured goods industry was one of the potential growth areas for the state, he said the state needed to find suitable methods to produce these items at cheaper cost compared to other countries as this would not only uplift the state's economy to a higher level but would also bring new opportunities to small and medium enterprises to grow.

“Projects like SCORE and semi-manufactured goods manufacturing industry will bring more chances to the people in the state to reap benefits. We are confident that institutions of higher learning have their own role to play in realising the hope and aspiration of the people who want to see the state prosper at the same development rate in other countries,” he said.

Earlier, Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi said Unimas was proud to have graduates who helped glorify the university in various world platforms.

Among them, he added, was Dr Dhesi Baha Raja, one of the world's Top 8 Young Health Innovators at Harvard University for Artificial Intelligence in Medical Epidemiology application.

He also mentioned that Unimas had attracted more than 700 international students from over 50 countries, and over 100 of its students were given the opportunity to study abroad through the mobility programme which involved partner universities in Indonesia, Korea, Japan, UK, Australia and Vietnam.

“The diversity we have here in Unimas has enriched our students' learning experience and increased our visibility as an internationally-recognised tertiary learning institute. We have also established research partnership through collaboration with industries and universities locally and internationally.”

He also said students and the academic staff were given a chance for a field trip outside the country through cooperation between Unimas and other agencies.

Citing an example, he said a group of students and lecturers visited Shibaura Institute of Technology, Japan last month with full sponsorship from the Science and Technology Japan Agency.

He disclosed that Unimas had taken the initiative to strengthen the use of English language as it is the international language used in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) through the restructuring and rebranding of the Language Studies Centre to Language and Communications Studies Faculty, besides improving mother tongue skills.

The first session of the convocation ceremony saw 4,275 graduates receiving their Degree, Master's and Doctorate scrolls in various fields. The 20th graduation ceremony is being held over four sessions, from yesterday to Nov 17.

The first session also saw the conferring of Honorary Philosophy Doctorate in Rural Community Transformation to Unimas Pro Chancellor Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu Numpang in recognition of his contributions in developing the rural community.

Meanwhile, the youngest PhD graduate in Chemical Engineering, Josephine Lai, was all smiles when she was approached for an interview just seconds after receiving her scroll.

The 25-year-old from Kuching has been studying in Unimas for seven years from Degree-level and plans to apply for post-doctorate studies in Unimas.

“Need to be hardworking and follow the guidance is the recipe of success,” she said.

Hoping to be a lecturer one day, she credited her mother for being the one who inspired her to take up PhD studies. Her father passed away when she was doing her matriculation.

Meanwhile, two sisters Ngu Nyok Ping (wheelchair bound) and Ngu Nyok Hua, 26, from Sibul both graduated with a master’s degree on the same day. Nyok Ping took Master of Science while Nyok Hua took Master of Corporate Business Administration.

Nyok Ping, 28, never let her immobility get her down during her studies. With support and encouragement from her father Ngu El Kiong, 58 and mum Soo Yok Chiet, 58, she pushed on to further her studies to the master’s level after completing her degree in 2009.

“The seven years I was in Unimas was a challenging period for me due to my mobility issues. But I never let it get to me because all my hard work has borne fruit.”

Her sister, on the other hand, was active in doing community work to help the disabled during her studies because she wanted to encourage and motivate the unfortunate to reach success like other people.

The Anugerah Pelajaran DiRaja (Pingat Jaya Cemerlang) went to Nurul Fatimah Amir from the Cognitive Science and Human Development Faculty (Counselling) and Hee Han Li from the Economics and Business Faculty (Accounting) and the Chancellor Award went to Siti Aishah Zulkafly from the Engineering Faculty while the Pro-Chancellor Award went to Kuanraj Balan from the Computer Science and Information Technology Faculty.