

Saudi students to study here

BY S. INDRAMALAR

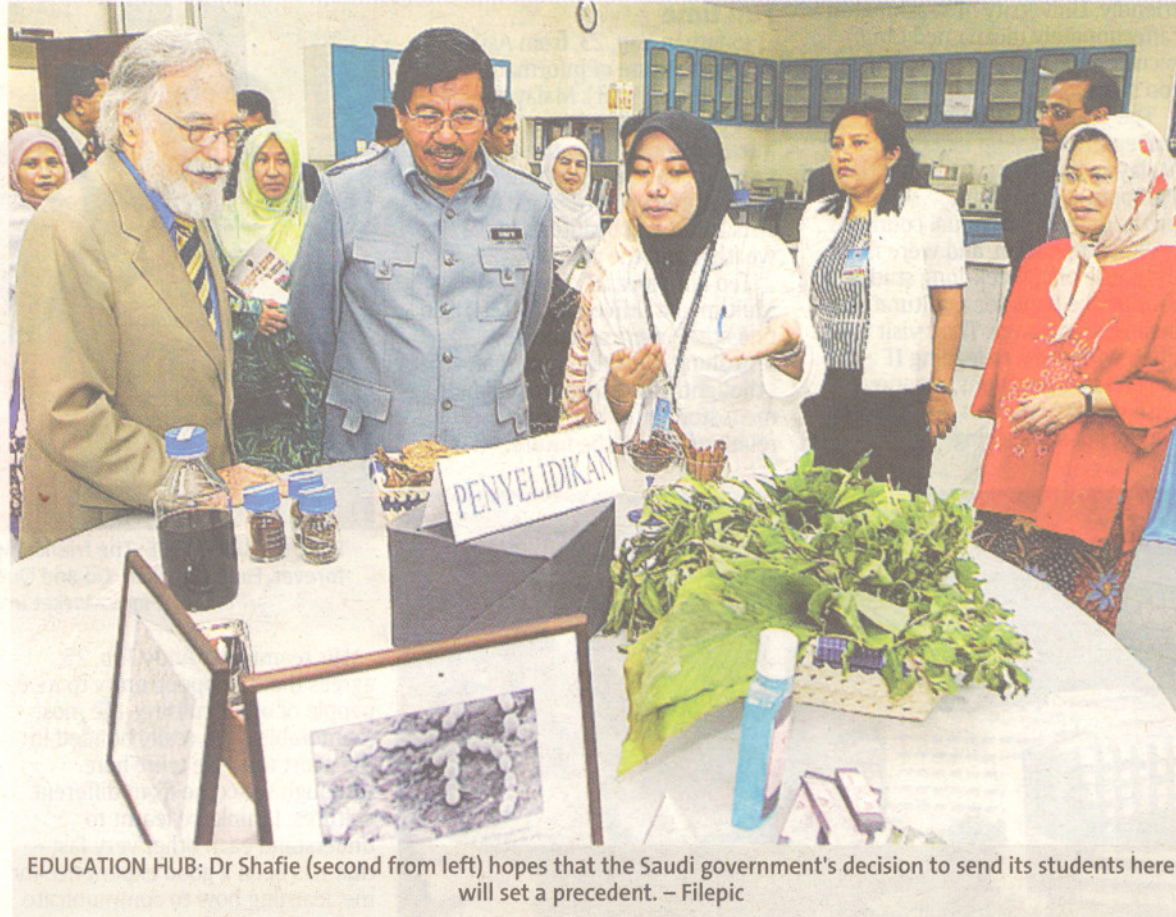
MALAYSIA'S effort to attract students from the Middle East has borne fruit as 200 of them from Saudi Arabia will pursue undergraduate programmes at several local universities this year.

This follows Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's successful three-day visit to the Middle East last month.

"The 200 students will be admitted into nine local universities recognised by the Saudi government and will enrol in courses that use English as the medium of instruction such as Teaching English as a Second Language (Tesl), Information Technology and Computer Sciences.

"The students will be funded via scholarships offered by the Malaysian government or tuition waivers offered by the respective universities. We hope that these 200 will set a precedent and encourage more students from the Middle East to head this way," said Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Mohd Salleh, who added that the students will be expected at the end of the year.

The nine universities recognised by the Saudi government comprise six public and three private universities. They are: Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, International Islamic



EDUCATION HUB: Dr Shafie (second from left) hopes that the Saudi government's decision to send its students here will set a precedent. — Filepic

University Malaysia, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Multimedia University and Universiti Teknologi Petronas.

Dr Shafie also urged public universities to formulate ways of

improving the English proficiency of their graduates to make them competitive globally.

He said universities must strive to improve the standard of graduates and equip them with the nec-

essary competencies required by the market.

"We have to re-examine the programmes that are in place and improve on them where necessary. It is important that our graduates

are versatile, skilled and can communicate well.

"Some already have programmes in place. At IIUM, for example, students who are not proficient have to sit for a six-month English programme and pass it before they can start their undergraduate studies," said Dr Shafie.

The meeting was held to discuss crucial issues relating to the higher education sector such as raising the standard of graduates to meet market demands as well as the implementation of double major programmes at universities.

Chairman of the vice-chancellors and rectors committee Tan Sri Prof Dr Abu Hassan Othman said the meeting was fruitful as it discussed pertinent issues on higher education that needed to be addressed.

"The minister presented his views and ideas, some of which require universities to re-adjust and adopt a new approach to meet current market demands.

"We have agreed to work out how we will implement the necessary changes. There will not be one approach that will be adopted by all the universities because we are all different in our own right.

"However, we will all work towards the ultimate objective of making our programmes and graduates more competitive," said Prof Abu Hassan who is the vice-chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sabah.