

Reaching out to industry and community



Sharing of intellectual capital and expertise reduces the gap between university, industry and community

ACADEMICS from Malaysia's four research universities — University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) — recently received their appointment letters for the positions of deputy vice chancellors of new portfolios.

They are UM's Dr Khaw Lake Tee (deputy vice chancellor for development), USM's Professor Dr Lim Koon Ong (deputy vice chancellor for industry and community network), UKM's Professor Dr Saran Kaur Gill and UPM's Professor Dr Tai Shzee Yew (both are deputy vice chancellors for industry and community relations). The appointments took effect from Sept 1 and their terms end in 2010.

The titles of deputy vice chancellors for these portfolios were created by the Higher Education Ministry as part of a move to enhance the universities' status as research institutions. Last year, the ministry announced the designation of the four institutions as research universities under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010).

They are expected to be leaders and role models for local public and private universities in the domains of inventions, innovations and research in Malaysia.

These research universities are given an additional allocation of RM513 million for research,

Four academics from University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia — Malaysia's designated research universities — were appointed deputy vice chancellors of new portfolios to forge ties with industry and community. **SUZIEANA UDA NAGU** reports.

development and commercialisation activities.

UM's Khaw carries a different title from the others following UM's successful appeal to the ministry to revive a post of deputy vice chancellor for development which had existed in the university until two years ago.

From 2006, the job was handled by deputy vice chancellor for research and innovation Professor Dr Muhamad Rasat Muhamad.

With Khaw's appointment, Muhamad Rasat has been relieved of the obligation to oversee infrastructure development allowing him to concentrate on forging industry linkages.

Khaw, a former dean of UM's law faculty, has been tasked to intensify the university's infrastructure capacity as stipulated in the Ninth Malaysia Plan. Khaw is the first woman to hold the portfolio.

The former UM legal adviser will also oversee development projects in the university's campuses in Petaling Jaya and Jalan Tun Ismail (its city campus), besides managing the division of services and facilities

and day-to-day maintenance of infrastructure.

"My responsibility is to make sure that UM has all the facilities it needs to play its role as a research university and eventually an Apex institution," says Khaw, who earned her first-class honours degree in law from UM.

She also has a LLM from Monash University, Australia and a PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science, the United Kingdom.

Ensuring that the facilities in UM are up to the mark is crucial "as they are the bedrock of a university", says Khaw.

"We have many administrative services such as publications, research and teaching to support the university. So the infrastructure must be there to enable UM to fulfil its functions," says Khaw, who was recently made the university's chief information officer.

As for USM's Lim, UKM's Saran and UPM's Tai, they are responsible for strengthening links between their institutions and community and industry for the purpose of,

among others, knowledge sharing, commercialisation of research products, industry placements for students and members of staff besides making sure that academic programmes meet industry requirements.

As Lim, a former acting dean of research and fundamental science platform in USM, puts it: "It is our role to match what the university has with the needs of community and industry."

Lim has two Bachelor's degrees (first-class honours in physics and another in education) from Queen's University, Canada. He received his doctorate in biophysics from University of Western Ontario, Canada.

Saran, a sociolinguist, views the "triangular relationship between university, community and industry" vital to Malaysia's development.

"University, industry and community have a wealth of intellectual capital and expertise. We need to learn from and collaborate with each other," she says.

Saran has an honours degree in

Arts and a diploma in education specialising in the teaching of English as a second language (TESL) from UM. She holds a Master's in Education (TESL) also from UM and a doctorate from the University of London, UK.

Granted, the drive to reach out to industry and community is nothing new. University, industry and community liaison offices have existed in the four universities for many years.

Some were set up by specific faculties through the initiatives of deans or lecturers while others were created by universities and placed under the purview of portfolios such as student and alumni affairs and research and innovation.

For example, faculties offering professional courses such as medicine and engineering have a formal unit which takes care of industrial training for students. In other faculties, the deputy dean is often charged with arranging industrial placements.

However, efforts to form partnerships with industry and community have largely been conducted on an ad hoc basis, say Lim, Saran and Tai.

"Until the creation of this portfolio, there had not been a structured way of establishing relationships with the outside community. Linkages happen mostly through the actions of individual lecturers or through the