

# A steady rise for Malaysian varsities

The Government has put in place initiatives to strengthen the country's higher education system, which is showing signs of improvements and soaring upwards.

EARLY one morning last week, I received a call from Prof Datuk Seri Dr Zaini Ujang, who is the Education Ministry's secretary-general II.

"Sir, I have good news," he said.

"Our national higher education system ranking has improved from 28th to 27th spot out of 50 nations according to the *Universitas 21 Ranking of National Higher Education Systems* (also known as U21)".

"And, we are ranked 21st when it was

adjusted for GDP and levels of development, ahead of Singapore, Japan, Germany and Hong Kong".

I said: "That's good. I believe we can still do better." "I agree, sir," said Zaini.

Just over a month ago, Quacquarelli Symmonds released the *QS World University Rankings by Subject 2015*. There were improvements in those rankings too.

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Malaya (UM) each had one subject in the world's top 50. USM ranked 31st for environmental science while UM ranked 32nd for development studies (this is a new subject included in this year's ranking).

Nine subjects were ranked within the top 51 to 100 in the world across five of our public universities, namely USM, UM, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Coincidentally, these five universities hold research university status (RU), a project

which the then Higher Education Ministry started in 2006.

UM leads the pack with six subjects in the top 51 to 100, including English and literature, linguistics, architecture and built environment, chemical engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, and mechanical, aeronautical and manufacturing engineering.

USM has five subjects within the top 51 to 100, which are architecture and built environment, chemical engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, development studies as well as mechanical, aeronautical and manufacturing engineering.

UTM has two in architectural and built environment as well as chemical engineering, while UPM and UKM have one each with agriculture and forestry, and development studies ranked within the top 51 to 100 in the world.

If we were to expand the list to the top 200 subjects, we would see the inclusion of two private universities, name-

ly Multimedia University (MMU) and Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP). In total, 10 of our public and private higher learning institutions are ranked within the top 200 in the world across 26 disciplines, including geography, pharmacology, business studies, economics and law.

It is heartening for me to see that most of our engineering faculties are ranked within the top 100 in the world.

Beyond the QS subject ranking, our universities have fared well in other discipline rankings. For instance, UPM ranked 54th in the world in agricultural science according to the Best Global Universities Rankings, while according to research group Elsevier, the International Islamic University Malaysia is tops when it comes to Islamic Banking, in particular in terms of authoritative articles published (11% of the world's total publications).

Subject rankings are an important indicator of the growth and improvement of our higher education system.