



**Forgot something?:** Ang and Fatini Nadhirah visiting Masitah's sundry goods booth on the first day of registration in USM.



**1** Universiti Putra Malaysia welcomed 3,800 new students for the 2015/16 academic session.



**2** Kaveintran (second from right) and Dennis (left) are thrilled to be room mates at UM's Seventh College. Their mothers Thanamala (right) and Teo helped them settle into their new accommodation.

# A great moving experience

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Students who earned a place in one of the country's 20 public universities moved into residential colleges last weekend to embark on their academic adventure.

THE all-important journey when students leave the nest to start their undergraduate degrees took place over the National Day long weekend.

It was a busy time for the freshmen as they left home and travelled by air or land transport to register for the 2015/16 academic intake in the 20 public universities across the nation.

This important step was captured at several universities.

At Universiti Sains Malaysia, Masitah Md Nasir, who runs a booth selling sundry goods, has noticed over the years that students tended to buy clothes hangers, padlocks and pillows the most on their first day.

"I see them coming every year. They bring along whatever they can, but these are three items that they most often buy.

"I think they don't realise they have to do their own laundry now that they have left home and are staying in the hostels here. When they see the clothes hangers, almost all of them will buy a bunch," Masitah observed.

This year, 2,968 new undergraduates were accepted into USM's main campus in Gelugor, Penang. Another 1,410 were accepted into USM's external engineering and medical campuses in Nibong Tebal and Kubang Krian in Kelantan respectively.

Among those spotted visiting Masitah's booth were 55-year-old Sally Ang and wheelchair-bound Fatini Nadhirah Mohd Nain, 19.

Ang was among the few in the "senior citizens" category who are pursuing degrees. She will be pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in English for Professionals. Her choice, she said, was influenced by her work as a private tutor.

"I was a banking executive in my early years and became a private tutor two years ago. English is so important for anyone to succeed and I hope to excel as a private tutor with what I will learn in this degree programme," she said.

Fatini Nadhirah was born with deformed legs. When she was in Form Five, she had a stroke of luck.

"I won a notebook in a lucky draw! I started playing with it all the time and now I love computers," she said. She will be specialising in Computer Science.

USM deputy vice-chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Prof Datuk Dr Adnan Hussein said the university's intake included 334 poor students who get a 50% discount on tuition fees, 32 state and national athletes, 40 foreign students and 10 physically disabled persons.

The poor students are classified under the Bottom Billion category, which in World Bank terms refer to the 1.4 billion underprivileged people in the world who earn less than US\$1.25 (RM5.34) a day.

They receive special attention in Malaysia as the B40 group, referring to people in the bottom 40% income group of Malaysian households earning less than RM2,500 monthly.

Meanwhile at Universiti Malaya, blind student Kaveintran Pulantran can't wait to start his studies and hopes to specialise in cyber law one day.

"I chose to study law because our lives are often bound by rules and regulations, so I want to understand how that works.

"A law degree offers a good platform to diversify into other careers," said the 21-year-old who was among the Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia top scorers in the special needs category in 2014.

"My main challenge would be the fact that most books are not available in Braille, so it would take more time to translate the text," said Kaveintran, who became visually impaired due to retinopathy when he was a baby.

"However, technology has made things a lot easier, as there are now apps that can be used to scan and digitally convert text into Braille format, and to help blind people nav-

igate."

His parents, administration officer Pulantran Muniandy and teacher Thanamala Muniandy, came from Ipoh to help him move in to his new hostel room and register.

"Kaveintran has been pretty independent from a young age, as he has been studying at residential schools for the blind in other states. We sent him to those schools because we wanted him to be independent and to get a good education," said Pulantran, 56.

He added that Kaveintran is a determined person who picked up IT and computer skills on his own.

Coincidentally, Kaveintran will be sharing a room with Dennis Teo Wei Xiang, whom he has known for the past eight years.

Dennis, who became partially blind due to retinal detachment when he was 12, will be pursuing a degree in Southeast Asian studies.

"I chose it as it's an interesting course with good job prospects," he said, adding that he could work as an administrator or lecturer.

On his choice of university, the 22-year-old from Puchong said he enrolled at UM as it's the only university in Malaysia with facilities for the blind.

"I look forward to making new friends and handling new challenges, such as having to rely on people for mobility and familiarising myself with a new environment," said Dennis, whose family was present to help him move in.

His mother Susie Teo said the family was proud of Dennis.

"He's set a good example for his two younger siblings. Dennis has always studied hard and does his own research," said the 50-year-old procurement executive.

UM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Amin Jalaludin assured the two boys and

their fellow disabled students that they would be well cared for at the varsity.

"They will be housed at the Seventh College, which is equipped with disabled-friendly facilities such as ramps, tactile tiles and computers with special software for the blind. There is also a van modified for transporting wheelchairs to shuttle them around," he said.

Prof Mohd Amin and UM deputy vice-chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Prof Datuk Dr Rohana Yusof were present to welcome new students during the registration day that also marked the start of UM's one-week orientation.

He said some 3,000 students are expected to be enrolled at UM for the new semester, though the final count will only be known this month after the appeal cases are evaluated.

"Of note for the 2015/2016 term are that UM has been given autonomy for student enrolment and a new finance degree programme that was introduced due to market demand.

"The autonomy for enrolment makes the process more transparent and procedures clearer.

The interview stage also ensures that students personally picked their choice of study. They were also counselled if we feel they're being pressured to study something else," said Prof Mohd Amin.

Science fiction fan SK Jobaid-Ur Rahman, who will be majoring in artificial intelligence (AI), is eager to start his computer science programme.

"I'm thrilled as AI was my first-choice course, and I hope to fulfil my dream of creating my own virtual assistant one day. I also look forward to experiencing the diversity and culture of people in KL," he said.

The 21-year-old from Bangladesh hopes to continue his love for sports at UM. He enjoys football, basketball, hockey, tennis and cricket.