Cultivating academic excellence

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A MIDST a challenging eco-
matic environment, the fo-
cus on education remained

While the government recalibrat-
ed and restructured the 2016 budget
earlier this year, the education sec-
tor was seen as a key focus area
recognised for its contribution to tal-
et and socioeconomic develop-
ment as well as being a key factor in
safeguarding the future of the coun-
try. With that view, creating oppor-
tunities and raising the quality of
education were top priorities.

In January, the government an-
nounced that four Public Service
Department sponsorship pro-
grames would continue to provide
opportunities for those pursuing
higher education.

Other measures announced were a
RM5 billion allocation for the Na-
tional Higher Education Fund
(PTPTN) for undergraduates, the
continuation of MyBrain15 — a
scholarship programme aimed at in-
creasing the number of profession-
als with a postgraduate certification
in Malaysia — the Academic Train-
ning Scheme for Bumiputera (SLAB)
and Academic Training Scheme of
Higher Education Institutions
(SLAB) programmes. A total of 15,000
students were to be added in the
MyMaster programme, 5,000 for
MyPhD, and 300 for SLAB.

In terms of reputation and rank-
ing, several universities made the
country proud. In June, five
Malaysian public universities were
ranked in the top 100 in the QS Asia
2016 University Rankings: Universiti
Malaya (UM) in 27th place, Univer-
siti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in 49th
place, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM),
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
(UTM).

Recently, three Malaysian univer-
sities made it to the top 100 list of
300 universities in 50 countries in the
Times Higher Education (THE)
BRICS and Emerging Economies University
Rankings 2017. UPM was in 89th place, a
climb of 14 places from its previous ranking,
while UPM was 31st and
UTM ranked 100th.

In terms of internationalisation,
2016 saw the completion of the review for
both Kurikulum Stanford
Sekolah Rendah
(KSSR) and Kurikulum Standard
Sekolah Menengah (KSSM), as
planned in the Malaysia Education

Education director-general Tan
Sri Dr Khair Mohamad Yusof told
the New Straits Times students
could expect changes of between 15
and 20 per cent in subjects’ syllabi,
which had been tweaked. The ped-
agogy of instruction and assessment
would no longer focus only on cen-
tral examinations, like SPM and
Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah
(UPSR), but also on school assess-
ment, co-curriculum, physical
health, sports and talent.

To address English language pro-
ficiency, a Roadmap for English
Language Education in Malaysia
spending from 2015 to 2025 was
approved, marking the beginning of a
journey to align the standard of En-
glish taught in Malaysian schools
and institutions of higher learning
with international standards.

In a bid to further democratis-
education and level the playing field
for schools, the Education Ministry has
set its sights on enhancing
broadband connectivity for some
2,000 schools in rural areas and the
interior to 4G, under the second phase
of the iBestari.Net initiative.

At present, Education Minister
Datuk 'Seri Mahdzir Khalid said
schools were using the Asymmetric
Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) and
Very Small Aperture Terminal
(VSAT), which have slow connectiv-
ity.

"I have already given the company
responsible and the Educational
Technology Division until early next
year, at the very least, to achieve
faster Internet speed," he had said.

Concerns about the increase of
bullying cases has led to the Edu-
cation Ministry announcing a plan
to enforce a one-year suspension on
all primary and secondary school
students involved in bullying.

It is expected to be enforced next
year.

Amidst the uproar of this year’s
unexpected UPSR results in Novem-
ber, the Education Ministry is
mulling a proposal to replace UPSR
with the School-Based Assessment
(PBS) next year. Under the plan,
examinations will comprise 50 per
cent of overall scores for students,
with the balance coming from stu-
dents’ emotional, spiritual and
physical aspects based on their par-
ticipation in school.

The school year ended on an up-
beat note with the announcement of
an improved performance in Math-
ematics and Science by students, as
measured by the Trends Interna-
tional Mathematics and Science
study 2015. TIMSS is an in-
ternational benchmarking study
conducted by the International As-
sociation for the Evaluation of Edu-
cational Achievement (IEA).

Khair said Malaysia was among 16
countries that recorded the highest
score in Science, at 471 points in
TIMSS 2015, an increase of 45 points
from the score of 426 in TIMSS 2011.

For Mathematics, Malaysia was
among 18 countries that recorded
improvements when it scored 465
points, an increase of 25 points from
the figure in TIMSS 2011.

Broadband connectivity for rural schools is being upgraded to 4G under the second phase of the iBestari.Net initiative. Pic by Luqman Hakim Zubir

Central examinations may be given less emphasis with the completion of KSSR and KSSM review. Pic by Farizul Hafiz Awang