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KOTA KINABALU: A total of 70,509 foreign students from over 150 countries are currently studying at public and private institutes of higher learning in Malaysia.

Disclosing this, Deputy Higher Education Minister Dato' Dr Hou Kok Chung said of the number, 25,263 were enrolled in the public institutes of higher learning (IPTAs) while 45,246 were studying at the private institutes (IPTs).

He said five countries with the highest number of students at the IPTA were Iran (5,948), Indonesia (3,763), China (2,122), Yemen (1,839) and Iraq (1,329).

China has the largest number of students at the Malaysian IPTs with 5,272 followed by Indonesia (4,806), Nigeria (4,684), Iran (3,940) and Yemen (1,713).

"The government is still offering places to increase the number of foreign students," Dr Hou told reporters during a visit to Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) here yesterday.

According to him, the IPTAs had been directed to increase the intake of foreign students by five per cent for the degree courses but no limit was imposed on the intake of students for postgraduate programmes.

Dr Hou also said the Higher Education Ministry was constantly encouraging the IPTAs and IPTs to attract more foreign students to help realise the government's goal of mak-

70,000 FOREIGN STUDENTS IN M'SIA

ing Malaysia a global higher education hub.

"Malaysia is currently a favourite destination for foreign students because the cost of living is much lower compared to many countries, and that the atmosphere was also more conducive," he said, adding that most of these foreign students were taking up business, tourism and computer science courses.

Dr Hou also said Sabah was a popular choice among foreign students.

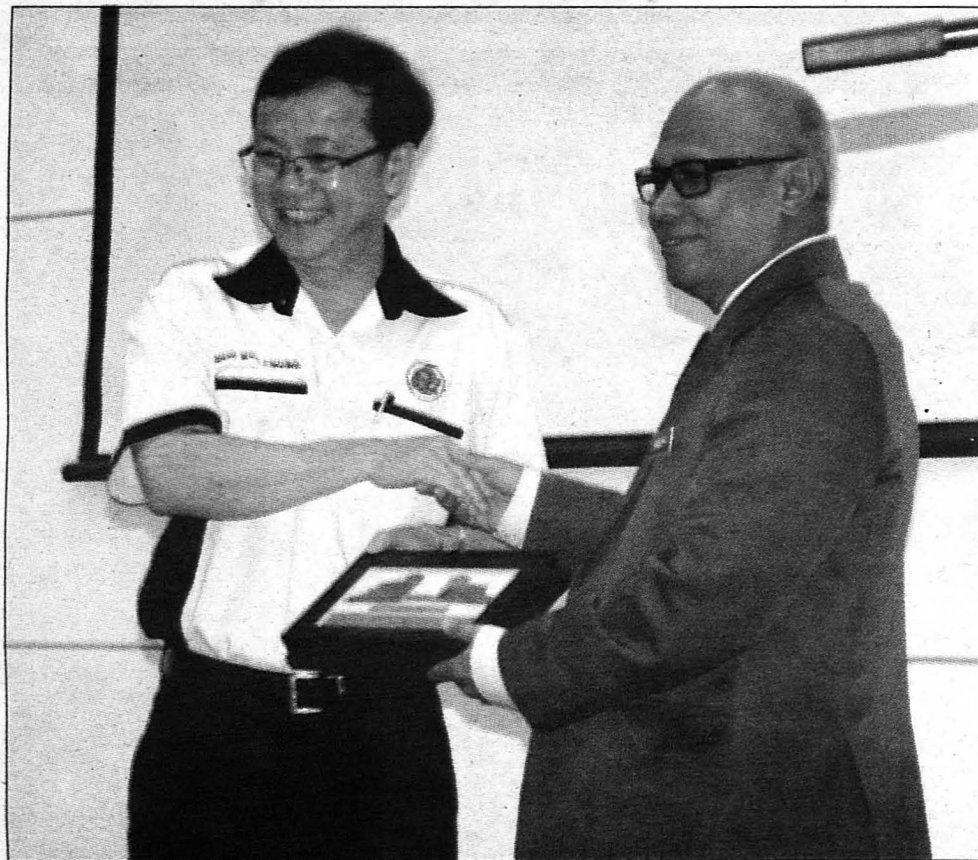
For example, he said UMS currently has close to 600 students from China, Brunei, Turkey, Tanzania, Myanmar, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Greece and Kenya.

Of the number 496 are from China, Brunei (24), Tanzania (13), Turkey (10) and Myanmar (3).

Dr Hou said there was still room for UMS to enrol more students from other countries.

Meanwhile, he said that as at August 31 this year, there were 506 IPTs - 445 colleges, 34 universities, 21 university colleges and six foreign university campuses - across the country.

"Twenty-five of these IPTs are in Sabah," Dr Hou added.



Dr Hou (left) receiving a memento from UMS deputy vice- chancellor Dr Shariff Abd Kadir

The deputy minister's visit to Sabah come students from China who had this time around was chiefly to welcome chosen UMS to further their studies.