

UMS foreign intake drop linked to incidents

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KOTA KINABALU: The kidnapping incidents in Sabah's East Coast should not deter international students, especially those from China, from studying in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), said UMS Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International Affairs) Prof Dr D Kamarudin D. Mudin. He said the incidents which occurred in islands in the East Coast could have affected the university's intake of international students.

"Those incidents happened in a remote area in the East Coast. We are in the West Coast and I'm sure you all know it is very safe here," he said.

He was responding to the reported decline in the number of international students this year, which is 16 per cent less than the previous year.

According to the Centre of International Affairs, 82 Chinese students enrolled in various undergraduate courses in UMS this year, and eight for postgraduate studies.

"We will be using the links and support from the Consul-General to increase our collaboration with our academic counterparts in China. We are showing our seriousness in this through our first satellite office in Heilongjiang, as well as providing a counter satellite office for Heilongjian Academy of Science (HAS) in UMS," he said, adding it would help in cultural and talent exchange between the countries, such as lecturers and researchers.

Dr Kamarudin added that it was to fulfil the vision and mission under the National Blueprint for Higher Education 2015, which is achieving a minimum of five per cent of students from the international community.

The varsity, which has the China Consulate's backing, will be opening a satellite office in Heilongjiang on Sept 29 to facilitate a 'Halal' food research collaboration, besides boosting the intake of Chinese students. The centre will be officiated by the Deputy Minister of Higher Education Datuk Mary Yap.

"Apart from research, the office would be used to expand the number of students, as part of logistics to communicate in other areas, such as postgraduate studies in China," he added.

Dr Kamarudin also said the varsity would do its best to increase the

opportunities for more international students and improve the varieties of its curriculum so that it would be more attractive to international students. The Chinese Consul-General in Sabah, Chen Peijie, said the hoteliers in Sabah were reporting a gradual increase of Chinese tourists to the State, which was a good indicator of the confidence they have in the State.

"Recently, some of the local hotel managers said there are more and more Chinese tourists returning to their hotels and I think it is a good signal," said Chen, adding that the presence of the consulate in the State may be another element that could draw the Chinese students to the varsity.

"One of the functions of the consulate office is to be concerned about Chinese citizens who are abroad, another reason I'm present at the press conference today," she added, jokingly.

She said the cultural exchange between the two countries would prove to be valuable, and Chinese students would act as social envoys from the country, and reflect a good image of the country.

UMS was held in high regards in China, said UMS-Beijing offshore officer Helen Liu Rong, adding that with the strong support from Chinese Consulate, the UMS International Affairs Office as well as the Deputy VC, the confidence level would definitely increase.

Liu introduced a former UMS student from China, who is currently based in the State and is attached to one of the biggest corporate bodies here, 1Borneo Management Corporation. There are currently 1,000 UMS ex-students in Beijing, and the UMS alumni chapter will be launched on Sept 30, after the satellite office takes off.

According to the Centre of International Affairs acting director, Molly Donna Datuk Awang, the students from China mainly go for business courses.

"They like doing business courses. Mainly they will be taking international business, tourism, marketing, hotel management and some of them are also in Science faculty as well as Tesol," she said, adding that 97 per cent of the previous students managed to graduate. The varsity is currently dwelling on attracting medical students from China as well, as talks are ongoing to include a quota for foreign students under the Commercial Unit.



Musa and Dr Harun (front) entering the UMS Chancellor Hall for the oath taking ceremony.