

# Neighbourliness and Mutual Interests in Academia: The Kuala Lumpur - CLMV Dialogue

## An Interview with the Director-General of the Department of Higher Education, MoHE, Y. Bhg. Professor Dato' Dr. Ir. Radin Umar Radin Sohadi

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Malaysia has seen rapid growth in the demand for higher education. We have, over the last two decades consolidated our efforts in promoting this growth systematically and efficiently. We have a strategic plan for higher education.

According to the Director-General of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Y. Bhg. Professor Dato' Ir. Dr. Radin Umar Radin Sohadi, "we believe we have strengths and at the same time we have weaknesses". Therefore he adds, "we should share" and "we should learn". IPPTN had the pleasure of talking to him at the *Strategic Dialogue on Higher Education and Developing Human Capital between Malaysia and CLMV Countries*, also known as *The Kuala Lumpur - CLMV Dialogue* held on 1 and 2 December 2008.

CLMV stands for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. The Kuala Lumpur - CLMV Countries came about from the World Bank *Symposium on Government and Non Government Participation in Education* held in July 2004 in Kuala Lumpur. It was with the awareness of development and challenges in higher education and the need to ensure that future workforce meets the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that this relationship became formalised through planned dialogues.

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"We have gone through the mill", said Radin referring Malaysia's experiences in meeting its higher education needs and demands. He adds that many countries are interested in our MQA (Malaysian Quality Assurance) and *Akta IPTS*. Some of these countries are in the position to want to learn how to go about setting up private institutions and ensuring the quality of the products of these institutions. In the spirit of ASEAN and neighbourliness, the



Prof. Dato' Dr. Ir. Radin Umar Radin Sohadi

Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) strongly advocates the best practices we have should be shared and further developed.

We are already collaborating with these countries at the diplomatic level. In this respect, Radin wants IPPTN to play a bigger role through networking and sharing and research activities. He sees IPPTN contributing as a Centre to disseminate policies. He also notes that in the 70s and 80s many Malaysians studied abroad, e.g. in Britain and New Zealand. Educationally Malaysians are familiar with the systems in those countries and academic collaborations are natural outcomes. "Research grants in this country [are] plenty, our private education is booming [and] we can take the numbers", he adds. CLMV Countries can utilise Malaysian Scholarship grants available to foreign students. Currently we have 60,000 foreign students. He states that we have rooms for 80,000 and would "welcome quality students especially government sponsored students". With shared Asian cultural values and being climatically similar, Malaysia offers ideal destination for knowledge growth and development to students and academics alike.

Malaysia also has things to learn from our neighbours. As an example, Radin speaks in awe of the Vietnamese prowess at the Olympic on Mathematics. In this respect, he sees more specific collaborations with each country with bilateral agreements between the universities of CLMV Countries. Internationalisation is a feature of Malaysia's higher education strategic plan.

Radin believes that co-operation and collaboration is the way forward for all of us in the region if we are to keep up with the rest of the world and the challenges ahead. We should create key performance indicators (KPIs) as our road map ahead and simultaneously as an "objective way of measuring" our efforts. "No more rhetoric, let's get on with it", he concludes.