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Singapore to have two more universities
 By Sharon See | Posted: 26 August 2012 2:158 hrs

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SINGAPORE: Singapore will have two more universities -- the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and the SIM University (UniSIM) -- bringing the total number of national universities to six.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in his National Day Rally speech on Sunday, said this will mean that by 2020, 40 per cent of each school-going cohort will be able to have a university education, higher than the current 27 per cent.

UniSIM is a private institution which runs full-time and part-time courses, while SIT has high quality foreign partners such as DigiPen and Technical University of Munich.

The government will build on their strengths and branding as institutions that have been working closely with industry and emphasising practice-oriented teaching.

With growing demand for university places among Singaporeans, Mr Lee said the government will increase full-time places for applied degrees at SIT and UniSIM.

He said: "Last year, I tasked (Senior Minister of State for Education, and Information, Communications and the Arts) Lawrence Wong to study this issue, and he concluded that we should create more university places.

"But that we should focus on applied, practice-oriented degrees, for example, engineers, physiotherapists, social workers -- skills which are useful, which are in demand, which will help to get the graduates jobs -- and we should not just churn out graduates, regardless of the quality or employment opportunities."

The addition of SIT and UniSIM as Singapore's fifth and sixth universities will open up 3,000 more full-time places per year by 2020 -- from 13,000 to 16,000.

This means four in 10 students of each cohort will be able to get a university education.

For part-time students, Mr Lee has also pledged greater support for them by making more part-time places available.

Mr Lee said part-time students at UniSIM will now be eligible for government bursaries and loans, like their counterparts at the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University.

He added that he hopes Singaporeans will take advantage of this -- not just to collect a piece of paper, but develop themselves and make a contribution to society.

Moving to the other end of the spectrum, Mr Lee said the government will play a more active role and invest substantial resources in pre-schools.

It will bring in new anchor operators in addition to the PAP Community Foundation and National Trades Union Congress.

Following suggestions from observers and experts to centralise government efforts in regulating the sector, the government will set up a new statutory board to oversee pre-school education.

Currently, the Ministry of Education oversees kindergartens, while the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports governs childcare centres.

However, Mr Lee said the government will not nationalise the pre-school sector, as a mix of operators offers diversity and choice.

He said: "Pre-school is to teach certain skills which are best learnt at that age, for example, languages, social skills, basic motor skills."

He added that education and child development experts warn against "over teaching" pre-school children. "No homework is not a bad thing," Mr Lee said, adding that it is good for young children to play and learn through play.

Prime Minister Lee said Singapore must always offer hope of a better future, and education is vital to creating hope for a better tomorrow.

He said education is Singapore's most important long-term investment in its people, and it is a key response to the changing world.

- CNA/al



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