

**NATIONAL DAY RALLY**



FILE PHOTOS

**Boost to higher education:** *The Singapore Institute of Technology and SIM University were yesterday announced by PM Lee as Singapore's fifth and sixth universities in a bid to increase the number of full-time places for applied degrees*

# More S'poreans to join university as govt recognises SIT and UniSIM

## New stat board to improve quality of pre-school education

By **MALMINDERJIT SINGH**

[SINGAPORE] Every two in five Singaporeans in each cohort will go to university by 2020, as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday announced the recognition of two more universities here.

However, higher education will not be the only beneficiary of the government's continued investment in education.

Mr Lee also revealed that a new statutory board will be established to improve the quality of pre-school education.

The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and SIM University (UniSIM) were yesterday announced by the Prime Minister in his National Day Rally speech as Singapore's fifth and sixth universities in a bid to

increase the number of full-time places for applied degrees here.

The two new universities will help to boost the current full-time university intake by a total of 3,000 students per year by 2020, from 13,000 students at present to 16,000 in eight years' time.

This will enable the proportion of each cohort making it to university increasing from 27 per cent now to 40 per cent by 2020.

It is necessary to open up more pathways in education, Mr Lee explained, to meet Singaporeans' high aspirations to upgrade their educational qualifications.

A committee headed by Senior Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong that was tasked to study this issue concluded that although more university places should be created, these must not simply churn out more graduates regardless of quality or job opportunities. Instead, the increased university places should focus on applied, practice-oriented degrees.

Hence, SIT and UniSIM were selected based on their emphasis on practice-oriented teaching and their close links with industry, said Mr Lee.

For instance, UniSIM, a private institution running part-time courses for adult students which collaborates closely with industry, runs courses in aerospace systems in partnership with aviation companies so that students also get to learn the practical aspects of aerospace engineering.

The SIT, on the other hand, has high-quality foreign partners in focused areas of training and offers degrees awarded by these institutions. These programmes include interactive digital media offered by DigiPen, science and engineering courses from the Technical University of Munich and culinary arts in partnership with the Culinary Institute of America.

According to the announcement made by Mr Lee on these two institutions yesterday, the full-time places for such applied degrees will increase as SIT will expand places and award degrees in its own name.

UniSIM will remain a private university but will add more full-time programmes and build on its strong links with industry.

However, Mr Lee pointed out that the government will also not forget the role UniSIM plays in providing education for part-time adult students and will provide more support for such students as well.

This will include making more part-time places available and extending government bursaries and loans, so that they receive the same support as their counterparts studying part-time at the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University.

In addition to higher education, Mr Lee also said yesterday that the government will strive to improve the quality of pre-school education in Singapore.

As good pre-school education will better prepare students for entry into primary school and provide long-term benefits thereafter, Mr Lee confirmed that the government will invest substantial resources in the pre-school sector and play a more active role.

education in Singapore.

One way it will do this is by establishing a new statutory board to oversee pre-school education.

"But we will not nationalise the pre-school sector," Mr Lee pointed out, as he reiterated the value of having a mix of operators that provide parents with diversity and choice.

Instead, he added, the government will emphasise raising the quality of pre-school education, especially for the anchor operators in the mass market, while keeping pre-school affordable for middle and lower-income households.

Specifically, Mr Lee said that the government will provide and upgrade pre-school teacher training, bring in new anchor operators in the mass market in addition to the existing two operators - PCF and NTUC - and upgrade these providers by offering more attractive career opportunities for teachers as well as creative learning methods for students.

He also mentioned that there will be a pilot programme for a few government-run pre-school centres to test new concepts in kindergarten education, while providing more support to low and middle-income families in the area of pre-school learning.

More details on these changes in education will be provided by the Ministry of Education.