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Viewing things differently



WHILE many Malaysian undergraduates are finding their feet – and having fun in the process – other more seasoned students are engrossed in a juggling act.

Many postgraduates have their families with them and with their research commitments, things can get tight.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas)'s deputy dean of the faculty of social science

Ahmad Nizar, 37, (pic) is one such person.

Currently pursuing his PhD in International Relations at the University of Western Australia, Ahmad is unearthing the intricacy of bilateral relations between Malaysia and Indonesia.

"I'm looking at constructivism – the impact of non-material factors," he explains.

"Malaysia and Indonesia share a lot in common when it comes to culture, language and economic history.

"However, differences exist when it comes to leadership, religion and nationalism issues. For example, the sacredness of religion is not enshrined in Indonesia's constitution."

Other issues such as ethnicity and the more traditional balance of power are scrutinised as well and with so much to analyse, he admits that things can get tough at times.

Fortunately for him, his wife Siti Zanariah Ahmad Ishak, 42, understands the situation as she is pursuing a PhD of her own.

Putting the spotlight on poorer folk in Sarawak, Siti Zanariah is researching how her subject group perceives the media as a source of information that could raise their livelihood.

Their three children aged 13, nine and eight are also Down Under, studying at Australian public schools.

And seeing his children growing up in a different environment brings the attentive Ahmad to verse.

"The way they're approaching – and questioning – things is different," he muses. "I believe the exposure to a different education system is behind this.

"Malaysian students memorise things well – sometimes, too well – but in Australia, the emphasis is on analytical skills.

"My children are learning about mind-mapping in Year Five and Six here,



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