WHAT if you happen to have $450 million lying around? Well, you can always come up with a spanking new university right in the heart of the city.

What if you can afford just one-tenth of that: $45m? Then try your hand at building Singapore’s very own low-cost airline terminal.

This all the recent talk about white elephants and trimming the fat from charities and public agencies, it’s little wonder MPs brought up such costing issues in Parliament yesterday.

Were you too “hasty”, for one, in spending money on the Budget Terminal (pictured above), asked Tampines GRC MP Sin Boon Ann.

Given cost considerations, we trust that Tiger would continue to operate out of the new terminal for as long as is commercially viable.

― Minister of State for Transport Lim Hwee Hua, replying to questions on building the budget terminal

back to the main terminal?

Mrs Lim chose to stay hopeful. “Given cost considerations, we trust that Tiger would continue to operate out of the new terminal for as long as is commercially viable,” she said.

Commercial viability — and Singapore’s fight to be an education hub — is also why West Coast GRC MP Ho Geok Choo feels Singapore Management University’s $450m city campus is worth the investment.

With “centuries of tradition”, elite institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge can afford to have old-fashioned buildings, she told The New Paper.

“But a new player like SMU needs to leverage on whatever advantage it can get,” Madam Ho argued.

And yes, that includes having an impressive hi-tech campus in a location to die for.

SMU’s new premises were officially opened just last month.

Earlier in Parliament, Madam Ho had asked how the Education Ministry ensures universities and schools don’t “overspend on building infrastructure”.

She’d seen one too — a single-storey complex, which is the size of three football fields, has so far signed up just one budget carrier and Thai Tiger’s rivals — Jetstar Asia, Valuair and Tiger — brought up such costing issues in Parliament yesterday.

For big-value projects over $5m, there’s even an extra layer of checks. These must be approved by a high-level committee, comprising the Finance Minister and two other ministers.

Best of all, Mr Gan pointed out, keeping development costs — the big bucks — down means long-term tuition fees will also stay down.

And that’s good news for you and me, whether we’re talking $45m or $450m.

How much control is possible over casinos?

ANOTHER “big bucks” issue also resurfaced in Parliament as the House debated the Casino Control Bill.

First up, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng told MPs the Government will only make such an investment in Singapore’s two integrated resorts, expected to be up and running in 2009.

This includes removing limits on the number of hours the casinos can be allowed to open.

The Bill will also set up a new statutory board called the Casino Regulatory Authority and put in place social safeguards.

While some of the nine MPs who spoke voiced concern similar to last year’s sitting, a few fresh issues cropped up.

These include: Should we physically separate local and foreign gamblers within the casinos?

Should we ban all “how-to-play-and-win” in-house programmes from the resorts’ hotel packages?

How can we control the distribution of cheap pamphlets offering sex ads and even stop contractors from pasting advertising stickers all over HDB lifts?

Can we introduce parental controls to prevent children from patronising the casinos here?

How can we make sure operators don’t entice people to gamble by forcing them to walk through (and be tempted by) its gaming areas, just to get to restaurants, shops, or even the toilets?

Mr Wong will give his replies when he wraps up the debate this afternoon.