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Najib-MIT

MIT AGREES TO HELP SET UP SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

By: Salmy Hashim

BOSTON (Massachusetts, United States), Oct 22 (Bernama) -- The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has agreed to form a partnership with the proposed Malaysia University of Science and Technology (MUST), Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said here on Monday.

Najib said MUST, a private university to be set up in Selangor, is scheduled to open its doors to some 50 students at the post-graduate level in September next year.

This is the first time the MIT, one of the world's leading institutions of higher learning, is involved with another country on a comprehensive basis, said Najib after a half-day discussion with MIT faculty members.

MIT and MUST are expected to submit to the Education Ministry a complete proposal for the creation of the university within the next two to three weeks.

The ministry would soon send a letter of invitation for the setting up of MUST, said Najib who is in Boston for three days and scheduled to stop in New York for a day to tour more schools offering multimedia courses.

Najib's MIT tour is a follow-up to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's September visit to the 130-year-old university well known for its teaching laboratories that have produced innovative engineers and inventors.

Dr Mahathir's interest in MUST and MIT coincided with his vision of creating a skilled and innovative workforce for the proposed Multimedia Super Corridor in Malaysia.

The prime mover of MUST, Encorp Group Sdn Bhd, a private investment holding company with head office in Kuching, is expected to spend RM400 million to set up the university.

The operating cost is estimated at between RM20 and RM30 million annually.

The amount is small compared to MIT's budget which is more than US\$1 billion a year (RM2.5 billion) and its sources of revenue include more than US\$200 million (RM500 million) a year from tuition, about US\$100 million (RM250 million) from endowment, US\$100 million from gifts and US\$700 million (RM1.75 billion) from research sponsors, said Karl Koster, the MIT director of corporate development.

Encorp executive chairman Datuk Effendi Norwawi, who has been working on the idea for the past two years, expects MUST to run at a loss for the first five years.

Hardly any university makes any profit, he said, but "we're doing it for socio-economic reasons and if the government formally approves the project, it would be a great achievement for our country".

Encorp, established in 1995, has stakes in banking, property development, the food industry, cement and entertainment.

Effendi plans to create a foundation to help fund the university and hoped the Malaysian private sector would support MUST for the future benefit of industries and the country's economic strength.

MIT's partnership with MUST would include joint research programmes, exchange of faculty members and students and participation of Malaysian industries.

MUST's goal is to offer research programmes in advanced material, biotechnology, microelectronic, infrastructure and automated manufacturing, said Professor Fred Moavenzadeh of MIT's department of civil and

environmental engineering. -- BERNAMA  
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