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BMI's first intake scheduled for 1999

Chok Suat Ling

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The British Malaysian Institute - a new technical training institute offering diploma courses focusing on the Multimedia Super Corridor - will open a school in Gombak in January, 1999.

BMI will offer programmes on British Edexcel Foundation/ Business and Technology Education higher national diplomas in communications technology, electronics technology and information technology.

The institute is a Mara Holdings initiative supported by the British Government.

And it will be open to all Malaysians with an inaugural intake of 330 students. Courses will run from two to three years.

Mara will provide the necessary infrastructure, land and building.

It will also procure equipment for training, office furnishing, facilities modification and logistic support, and recruit personnel, teaching and management staff.

The British Government will provide technical expertise, delivery of quality state-of-the-art training and sourcing and setting up training equipment.

The British will also provide instructor training in the United Kingdom for up to 50 local instructors from 1997 to 1999, and subsequent in-service training locally.

Construction of the institute starts in September.

The BMI's main objective is to provide young Malaysians with advanced, yet practical training not only to cope with future demands but help combat the growing skills shortage.

"Development funding totalling RM50 million to provide the necessary infrastructure, which includes land, premises and equipment, has been approved," Mara chairman Datuk Othman Abdul told reporters after the opening of a joint meeting between the Malaysia-British Society and British-Malaysia Society at the Putra World Trade Centre today.

By 2001, BMI will be fully operational with 1,000 students at any one time.

However, Othman did not say what the selection criteria would be except that it was open to all races.

Students would be taught by local and British instructors.

Asked whether BMI will take in foreign students in line with the Government's policy to increase foreign intake, Othman said although the policy applied to universities, Mara would consider the option as it adhered to making Malaysia a centre for educational excellence.

On whether the institute would be conducting degree and twinning courses in future, he said: "Not yet but there may be a possibility later."

On the fee structure, Othman said Mara would be will sponsor some students and encourage local industries to do the same.

British High Commissioner to Malaysia David Moss said the British Government was approached by Mara in December 1994 to support the institute.

In addition to the British Government's contribution, he said the British private sector was also interested in establishing the institute.

"The response has been tremendous," he said. "British Aerospace will manage the instructor training project on behalf of the British Government. BICC, GEC, Rolls Royce and Vickers have also pledged support."

Meanwhile, British Aerospace Plc's participation in the BMI is an

indication of the aerospace giant's commitment towards assisting Malaysia in its effort to set up the MSC.

BAe was appointed as the project director for the institute and would also undertake the staff training project for the British Government.

BAe executive vice-president Professor Steve Grigg said the company's participation in the institute was an indicator of its confidence in the MSC.

"It shows our confidence in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad's efforts to set up the MSC," he said in an interview with the New Straits Times at the Shangri-La Hotel.

Grigg said the setting up of the institute was the climax of the six "good and fruitful years" of relationship between BAe and Malaysia.

"Apart from us, BAe Australia is also keen to participate in the educational and aviation partnership with Malaysia," he said.

Among the programmes which will be available at the BMI are communication technology, multimedia computer technology, industrial electronic technology and medical electronic technology.

"We are also trying to develop a telemedicine and a diagnosis health centre to tie with the MSC," Grigg said.

Other than the BMI, BAe is also involved in the setting up of a CD-Rom library and a composite research programme with Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

It is also collaborating with some local partners to develop Virtual Reality programme for the proposed Smart Schools in Malaysia.

Also in the pipeline is the Asian Multimedia Academy in Kuala Lumpur.

"We have discussed this academy with senior Government officials over the past two days.

"We are now finalising talks with our local partners and hopefully, this project will get off the ground soon," said Grigg.

BAe's presence in Malaysia started about six years ago following the move by the Royal Malaysian Air Force to buy 28 Hawk advanced jet trainers costing more than RM1 billion.

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