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Petronas varsity to enrol 1,000 students by 2001

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The proposed Petronas University of Technology will help ease the shortage of science and technology professionals faced by the oil, gas and petrochemical industry.

Once upgraded, the university, now known as the Petronas Institute of Technology, will be able to take in 1,000 students annually by 2001.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said with more land made available and additional facilities, the university would be able to take in up to 10,000 students.

Speaking to reporters after handing over an official invitation to the national oil company to establish UTP today, he said:

"The upgrading of the ITP means the completion of the first phase of a programme to give university status to training institutes run by private corporations.

"The Government will ensure that these private universities will meet the objectives of their establishment, especially in the type of courses offered."

The invitation was received by Petronas president and chief executive Datuk Mohd Hassan Marican at a ceremony at Bangunan Dayabumi.

Petronas is the third private corporation, after Telekom Malaysia and Tenaga Nasional Bhd, to be accorded the honour of having their training institutes upgraded into universities since the introduction of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996.

Najib said although some duplications might occur, the National Council on Higher Education would see to it that those which had been upgraded focused on certain disciplines.

For instance, the Telekom University would concentrate on telecommunication engineering, the one run by Tenaga Nasional power engineering and the UTP on petroleum engineering and disciplines in petrochemicals.

With such an approach, Najib hoped the available resources, like infrastructure, equipment and teaching staff could be optimised.

He said the UTP would provide more opportunities for Malaysian and foreign students to pursue tertiary education in the country.

"By providing more places locally, the number of students going overseas can be reduced. This also means savings on foreign exchange."

Najib was confident the UTP would help address the shortage of manpower in the oil, gas and petrochemical industry.

"In a study conducted by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 1993, it was found that there was a wide gap between the production and demand of skilled and qualified personnel in the industry.

"Local and foreign universities and training institutes produced only 2,395 graduates in that year whereas the demand was for 6,413.

"This shortage is expected to continue until 2002 and would become more acute due to competition from the manufacturing, electronics, power, telecommunication and construction industries."

The ITP is managed and administered by Institute of Technology Petronas Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Petronas. It also has twinning programmes with five foreign universities.

Courses are now conducted from the Universiti Sains Malaysia's branch campus in Seri Iskandar, Tronoh, Perak.

The Government has allowed Petronas to take over the campus at a cost of

RM215 million and further expansion will be carried out by Petronas.

The USM branch will be relocated to another site in Penang.

At present, the courses offered by the Petronas institute are a five-year Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering, Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Chemical and Process Engineering, Petroleum Engineering/Gas Technology, Information Technology/Computer Science and Geology/Geophysics.

As a university, it plans to offer a Master's Degree and Doctorate of Philosophy programmes, including a Bachelor's Degree in other areas (including non-technical) related to the petroleum and petrochemical industries.

It now has 178 students for the 1996/1997 academic session, 64 of whom are second year students. A fresh intake of 200 students is expected for the 1997/1998 session which begins in May.

Najib said no quota had been set on the number of places for foreign students at the university.

He said the university would have its fair share of foreign students, adding that as a multi-national, Petronas saw the need to train students from countries where it has vast business interests.

Asked on the next private university to be established, Najib said many corporations had shown interest but the Government must be satisfied that they meet certain requirements before making an offer.

Meanwhile, commenting on objections from the National Union of the Teaching Profession on the single-session school, Najib said he was optimistic that an amicable solution would be found.

He said the union had voiced several reservations which the ministry hoped to overcome through further talks.

"Its main bone of contention is the extra workload shouldered by teachers," he said.

He said the NUTP realised the advantage of having the system but "has to make some noise" to champion the interests of its members.

On whether the facilities were adequate to meet the needs of a single-session school system, Najib said:

"We must be pragmatic. The syllabus to be covered is extensive but time is rather short, especially for subjects like science and mathematics.

"As the emphasis is now on such subjects, we have to find the additional teaching hours. If we want students to excel in these disciplines which will later benefit the country, we must do this."

However, Najib stressed that the system would be implemented progressively.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the system would be implemented as the Government had always placed emphasis on education.

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