

20/08/1998

Move to increase number of scientists gets nod

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet today agreed to allow graduates in the private sector to apply for scholarships from the Human Resource Development Fund for Science and Technology in a move to increase the number of scientists and researchers.

Prior to this, applicants for scholarships given out under the RM300 million fund had to be confirmed officers nominated by public research agencies and universities.

However, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today there were very few candidates selected and the programme was proceeding too slowly.

The fund, launched under the Seventh Malaysia Plan, has only benefited 179 people to date. The ministry has also disbursed RM8.89 million in scholarships.

"A study by the Stanford Research Institute showed that Malaysia needs 492,834 scientists by the year 2020. This means we have to produce an average of 19,000 scientists yearly.

"We cannot meet this target at the rate we are going. As such, we have to extend the scholarships to graduates in the private sector," Law told reporters after the Cabinet meeting.

Up to 1995, Malaysia had only 22,872 scientists. The 1996 National Survey of Research and Development carried out by the ministry's Malaysian Science and Technology Information Centre revealed that the country only had five researchers for every 10,000 people.

Japan has 82 researchers for every 10,000 people, the United States 74 and Singapore 48.

To enable graduates in the private sector to obtain scholarships, the ministry has established the National Science Fellowship Scheme under the fund.

"It is an elite scheme for excellent candidates in both the public and private sector," said Law.

Candidates must be graduates pursuing a masters degree or Ph.D. in science subjects which come under the Government's priority areas.

The areas are Industrial Design, Advanced Materials, Information Technology, Microelectronics, Multimedia, Biotechnology, Advanced Manufacturing, Aerospace, Industrial Pollution Control, Energy, Pharmaceutical and technologies identified under the second Industrial Master Plan.

To attract excellent candidates, the ministry will provide a monthly allowance of RM1,800 and RM2,900 for Masters and Ph.D degree holders respectively.

Law said it was estimated that the Government would spend RM3.29 million for the first 100 candidates under the scheme.

Candidates must also pursue courses in local public or private universities.

The Government will have to spend RM120,000 per year on each candidate sent abroad compared to only RM32,900 if the course is taken locally.

Law also today submitted the National Academy of Sciences' 1997 annual report to the Cabinet.

Among others, the academy had organised six lectures and published the book Mahathir: Kepimpinan dan Wawasan Alam Sains dan Teknologi.

It had also established a co-operation network with academies of

sciences in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil and India.

The Cabinet has also agreed to a request for Malaysia to host the Asia Pacific Meteorological Programme's 14th Working Group Meeting on Meteorological Laser and Dimension from Aug 22 to Sept 3.

(END)