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Training for the unemployed

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Retrenched workers, unemployed school-leavers and graduates can now apply for places in nine schemes, paid for by the Government, for skills training and higher education.

The RM300 million programme is expected to benefit 30,000 graduates and 10,000 retrenched workers who will also be paid monthly allowances of up to RM500 each.

Announcing the details today, Economic Planning Unit deputy director-general (macro) Datuk Halipah Esa said there was no limit to entry into any of the schemes.

The programme is part of the RM4.3 billion stimulus package announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last month to cushion the impact of an imminent global economic slowdown.

It is aimed at assisting the unemployed to learn new skills and to alleviate their financial difficulties.

There are two major programmes, sub-divided into nine schemes.

The first programme, which has two schemes, is aimed at upgrading of skills. It is targeted at retrenched workers and unemployed school-leavers.

Its focus is on training in specialised skills, information communication technology and learning of languages with commercial value like English, Arabic or Mandarin.

The second programme, with seven schemes, is aimed at unemployed graduates and has a focus on higher studies and practical experience through attachment programmes. Under this programme, the Government has opened the National Higher Education Fund to masters' students.

Another highlight is the provision of loans from Bank Pertanian Malaysia for graduates to undertake projects in commercial agriculture.

Halipah said if the response was good, the Government might increase the allocation to enable more to participate in the programmes.

She also said the unemployment rate in the second quarter was 3.7 per cent and four per cent in the first quarter, still considered as full employment by international standards.

She said 23,500 workers had been retrenched from January to August, with the highest numbers in Penang, Johor and Selangor, and mostly from the manufacturing sector.

She also said 53,500 graduates and 22,200 diploma holders would enter the job market next year, and not all of them would get jobs. As at the second quarter, 44,000 graduates were unemployed.

Asked if companies might take advantage of these schemes to retrench their staff, Halipah said the Government had reminded them of their social responsibility and hoped that they would not do so.