

Pakistan changes

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rules for students

Wisma Putra clearance is essential

**From Ainon Mohd
in Islamabad**

STUDENTS who want to study in Pakistan must get Wisma Putra's clearance before their journey, Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Sopian Ahmad said here yesterday.

Wisma Putra has directed the High Commission not to issue any "no-objection certificate" to those who want to study in Pakistan.

The certificate is an authorisation letter confirming the student's status.

This follows a decision by Pakistan to come down hard on those who enrol while holding a social visit pass.

Pakistan has decreed, in a bid to curb militant activities mainly in *madrasah*, that all foreign students be registered with their respective embassies.

They have have until March 23 to

register. After that the authorities will take stern action against students with social visit passes.

The Government will carry out checks on students throughout the country.

"Wisma Putra will from now onwards study and check the purpose of their visit to Pakistan.

"I hope that students will take note of this and take the necessary measures to ensure that they are not detained unnecessarily by the Pakistani Government for not having proper documents."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had before voiced concern over the tendency of some parents to send their children for religious studies in Pakistan's *madrasah* as these could be training militants.

The concern arose from several cases where students cited religious studies as the reason to go

abroad but instead got involved in militant activities.

It is estimated that there are some 20,000 *madrasah* in Pakistan. There are currently 285 Malaysian students in institutions of higher learning and *madrasah* in Pakistan.

There were 385 last year, but about a hundred returned to Malaysia after the US began bombing Afghanistan in October or left after completing their courses.

Sopian said Malaysian students should not take this directive lightly as the Pakistani Government was serious about the crackdown on militants.

"Those without proper documentation will be detained. I believe there are still many Malaysians students who came to Pakistan without proper documentation. Somehow or other, they are reluctant to register themselves."