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Move to expand pool of skilled manpower lauded

THE Government's allocation of RM1.62 billion in Budget 2003 to enhance skills and expand the pool of skilled manpower is the right move to facilitate Malaysia's transition to a knowledge-based economy.

Economists contacted by Business Times said the huge allocation is in line with the emphasis in the Eighth Malaysian Plan (8MP, 2000-2005) on the k-economy.

"It is rightly so, considering the Government's priority on human resource development," economist Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The k-economy is an economic structure that comprises many knowledgeable workers who are highly skilled in their respective fields.

Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when tabling Budget 2003 in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, said the RM1.62 billion will be allocated to the Human Resources, Entrepreneur Development, and Youth and Sports Ministries to implement various skills training programmes, infrastructure facilities and to finance management expenses.

Some RM621 million is allocated to implement and manage 29 Industrial Training Institutes and Skills Training Centres with a capacity of 18,200 trainees.

The Youth and Sports Ministry will be given RM410 million to implement and improve the facilities of 25 Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara, while the Entrepreneur Development Ministry will receive RM355 million to establish 33 Institut Kemahiran Mara to train 49,600 trainees at various skill levels.

To create more skilled manpower in research and development (R and D), the Government has established a training grant of RM100 million to be channelled to private companies to finance the training of their R and D personnel.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Senator Zainal Rampak wants the government machinery to be more efficient in implementing skills development programmes for the k-economy.

He said the training programmes should benefit both the school-leavers and existing workers.

"The amount is big, especially the allocation for the Human Resources Ministry, so the ministry should be more efficient and transparent in the implementation.

"Employers (also) have to cooperate with the Government by allowing their workers to be sent for training," Zainal said in Petaling Jaya.

In Budget 2003, the Government also provided an allocation of nearly RM5 billion between 2002 and 2008 to enhance the teaching of English in Science and Mathematics.

A large portion of this allocation is for the training of teachers, a launching grant for schools, teaching aids as well as basic facilities and physical infrastructure.

This year and next, RM978.7 million will be spent to equip teachers with notebook computers, LCD projectors and other related equipment.

The Government earlier this month launched the K-Economy Masterplan, which identifies human resources development as the most critical area that needs to be improved to enable the country to become a full-fledged developed nation by 2020.