

16 JAN 2003

Defence-Doctors

DEFENCE MINISTRY OFFER 31 MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIPS

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 16 (Bernama) -- To meet the shortage of doctors in the armed forces the Defence Ministry will award scholarships to 31 first year medical students in local universities.

In addition, seven dental students in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and five pharmaceutical undergraduates from Universiti Teknologi Mara would also receive similar scholarships, its minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today.

"The shortage is not only faced by the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) but appears to be a national problem. Doctors will resign to work in the private sector," Najib told reporters after the Royal Military College annual parade at the Sungai Besi Camp here.

The 31 recipients are 10 students from USM, UKM (10), Universiti Putra Malaysia (4) Universiti Malaya (3), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (2) and Islamic International University (2).

Upon completion of their five year programme students would be commissioned to the rank of a captain and need to serve the forces for 10 years.

To encourage medical officers to continue serving the MAF, the ministry would offer scholarships to pursue their higher education in local varsities and so far 13 doctors had taken the offer, Najib said.

At present 160 doctors are serving MAF including 18 from the Pakistan Army.

The ministry would also increase the intake of non-Malays in the military college -- in tandem with the objective to raise the overall recruitment.

"The intake of non-Malays this year reached 27 per cent and we hope to achieve 30 per cent by 2005 when the college is ready to accomodate 800 students compared to the current 500," added Najib.

He said the non-Malays should view the college training more positively because it does not only focus on academic excellence but also helps in nation building.

The college had proven by producing leaders and professionals from the various communities.

Asked about Indonesia's proposal to take over the Flight Control Management in the Sumatera area which was published by the foreign media yesterday.

Najib said only the International Civil Aviation Organisation could decide on the matter and not the individual country.

The organisation would consider whether the respective country had the facilities and human resources to manage the airspace.

Meanwhile, Najib said there are significant indicators that Umno could wrest Pas-led Kelantan and Terengganu.

"There are clear signs of changes in these states but we must be aware that politics is dynamic," he added.

But Najib, Umno vice-president, did not reveal what the indicators are.

Yesterday Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was on a two-day visit to Kelantan, said the Barisan Nasional is confident of winning back the east-coast state after a 13-year lapse.

Since the 1999 General Election, Umno had continued to strengthen its position in all the states, mainly in Kelantan and Terengganu.

In his speech to the Kelantan people Dr Mahathir said the government

could change the state's development pattern, that lagged economically, if given the mandate to rule.

Meanwhile, Najib asked Umno leaders to get closer to the grassroots and voters so they are confident with the party.

Priority, he said, should be given to the party's success instead of individual interest.

"We believe if Umno members unite and have high commitment it is not impossible for Dr Mahathir's statement to become a reality."

-- BERNAMA

MHI MFJ VP