

22 AUG 2004

Abdullah-University

NO LIMIT ON SETTING UP OF NEW UNIVERSITIES - ABDULLAH

BANDAR SERI ISKANDAR, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today said the government has not set any limit on setting up of new universities in the country, but it wants the focus to be on science, technology and biotechnology.

The Prime Minister said the emphasis was on these three fields as they were expected to steer the country's development in the future.

"Biotechnology is gaining importance. The growing biotechnology industry may become bigger than ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the future," he said at a news conference after opening Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) here today.

UTP Chancellor and former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Petronas President and Chief Executive Officer Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican, Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali and UTP Rector Dr Rosti Saruwono were present.

Abdullah said the government would not simply allow setting up of new universities as it took account the manpower needs.

"This is to ensure that university graduates are able to contribute to the country. We should have planning...then we set up (universities)," he said.

There are 17 public tertiary education institutions (IPTA) nationwide including university-colleges. As for private higher learning institutions (IPTS), there are 15 including five university-colleges.

Malaysia also has 518 colleges.

Abdullah said IPTS also provided education to some 295,000 students including 23,000 foreigners.

He said the government welcomed private sector's ventures in education but they needed to have strong financial standing in order to provide quality services.

Abdullah said the move by major corporations like Petronas, Tenaga Nasional Berhad and Telekom to set up private universities had been successful and this was in line with the government's call for courses offered to be relevant with current needs.

He said close networking between universities and industrial sector was a crucial factor towards maintaining the country's competitive edge in its economy and work force.

"It is also important in terms of developing science and technology apart from enhancing the country's innovative system. For example in basic research and development and applications as the industrial sector knows what consumers want," he said.

Earlier in his speech, Abdullah said existence of close industry-university cooperation would be able to push research work to greater heights, producing results with great commercial prospects.

He said the government encouraged smart partnership between industries and universities as this could turn the country's tertiary education institutions into world renowned research and development (R&D) centres.

Despite large allocation set aside by the government in efforts to produce science, engineering, medicine and ICT experts, it was still inadequate without private sector's participation, he said.

He said the setting up of IPTS had reduced foreign exchange outflow and turned Malaysia into a leading regional education hub as it offered high quality education at low costs.

Abdullah said both IPTA and IPTS provided manpower for various sectors and assisted the country's economic transformation from that of manufacturing-based to knowledge-based.

"This is important to maintain the country's edge in global economy which is getting more competitive and challenging," he said.

On UTP, Abdullah expressed confidence that it would turn into among top universities in the region, similar to what had been achieved by Petronas in becoming an international petroleum company capable of venturing into global market.

He said based on the "industry-driven" approach, sophisticated infrastructures and facilities apart from dedicated students and staff, UTP was able to carry out quality researchs.

"I have been informed that UTP is gaining reputation as an international hydrocarbon research centre. I am confident that with this cutting-edge researchs, students can improve their capability, efficiency and potential to become high-powered workforce in the future," he said.

UTP began operations as Petronas Technology Institute in Kuala Lumpur in 1995 and had to share academic facilities with Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Petronas Management Training Institute in Bangi.

It later moved here and took over the Perak-branch of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). UTP now has 6,600 undergraduates.

-- BERNAMA

AR ZUL