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Banking on 'simple' items to attract crowds

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - A petri dish, a ticket, a corn cob and a will. There may be nothing fancy about these objects but the organisers of the Centennial Nobel Exhibition 2004 hope that crowds will come once they find out that these are items linked to scientist Alexander Fleming, writer Ernest Hemingway, geneticist Barbara McClintock and Alfred Nobel.

In the exhibition, from March 20 to June 27, 747 Nobel laureates will be featured, along with the petri dish in which Fleming discovered penicillin, an original ticket from a Shakespeare company which belonged to Hemingway, the corn cob used by McClintock to talk about the jumping gene and Nobel's original will and testament.

National Science Centre director A. Jayanath said there would be 60 to 70 such artifacts at the exhibition, as well as merchandise available for sale to the public.

"There will be a spinning top that is special because it will spin upside down at first and then rise on its own. The Nobel Museum has a set of merchandise which we will be helping to sell, plus we will be adding some of our own," he said in an interview recently.

The merchandise includes simple inventions that are actually toys meant to "titillate cognitive powers and the imagination", such as "plastic mud" and "dynamite candy".

The exhibition, to be held at the NSC, is aimed at inspiring Malaysians to strive for scientific excellence and produce a Nobel laureate by 2020, a challenge thrown by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1998.

Themed "Cultures of Creativity: Individuals and Milieus", the exhibition will cover 750 square metres and have five components.

He said: "The first is on Alfred Nobel and his life, the second is the Nobel system and how people are nominated for prizes.

"The third component is the individual laureates and how they came up with their discoveries through creativity. Another is the environment or milieus these people came from, and how it provided a supportive environment for them," he said.

Last but not least, he said, was the timeline, which would feature all laureates by each decade from 1901 to 2001 using visual text posters and state of the art multimedia.

He said the NSC staff were excited about hosting the event and were happy that the centre's facilities were deemed good enough for the exhibition.

"We will also be holding our own exhibition which focuses on Malaysian scientists and their inventions to give Malaysians an opportunity to learn about our home-grown talent."

He added that this exhibition would serve to complement the Nobel Exhibition.

Also for the first time in the history of the centre, it will be open every day from March 20 to June 27.

"From Monday to Friday and Sunday we will be open from 9am to 6pm, and on Saturday, to get more families coming in, we are open from 9am to 9pm. Usually we close on Fridays for maintenance but we made the decision to cater to those from other States whose weekend may start on that day," he said.

The centre, he said, was working closely with the Culture, Arts and

Tourism Ministry in planning packages to promote the event internationally, especially targeting Asean visitors.

The Education Ministry, he said, was working with the centre to make sure the target of 300,000 student visitors would be achieved.

"To me this is the culmination of all the effort we have been taking to spark creativity especially among the young. In general everything will be focused on creativity, with creative workshops as well to get people to think outside the box," he said.