

Chance to show documentaries to the world

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KUALA LUMPUR: Local documentary makers have two reasons to work even harder now.

A total of US\$400,000 (about RM1.5 million) is being offered to fund the production of two high-definition documentaries.

As a bonus, the documentaries will be aired in 27 languages over the National Geographic Channel in 164 countries.

At the signing of a memorandum of understanding yesterday, National Geographic Channels International (NGCI) and the National Film Development Corporation (Finas) urged local filmmakers to submit proposals for the NGCI-Finas HD Documentary Fund 2006.

"There aren't many documentaries on Malaysia when this country has much to show, so this would be a great challenge," NGCI executive vice-president of production, Bryan Smith, said.

The project is open to local production companies registered with Finas.

The stringent selection criteria will ensure that only two of the most resourceful and deserving produc-

ers with dramatic topics, strong central characters and great storytelling skills will get the money.

Each of them will be expected to produce an hour-long documentary, shot using high-definition equipment, which would showcase Malaysia to the world.

"High-definition" or "HD" is the

emerging industry standard for clearer pictures on television.

Smith said the chosen producers would have to follow strict guidelines, including the selection of themes for their documentaries.

The proposals, which must be submitted by Nov 15, should be based on preferred themes such as the modern world, science and technology, wildlife or an in-depth look at topics such as space launch or the secret service.

Proposals must also include a detailed budget, estimated production schedule, the biography of members of the production team and VHS or DVD sample of previous work.

"National Geographic and Finas will play the role of advisers. Besides funding, we coach them on proper filmmaking techniques, development of story idea and pitching tactics," said Smith.

He added that short-listed filmmakers would be notified in early December. They will attend a two-day workshop on Dec 12 and 13 where they will pitch their projects to a panel comprising NGCI se-

nior producers.

Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim, who witnessed the signing of the MoU, said it was a dream come true to have high quality documentaries on Malaysia shown to a worldwide audience.

"NGCI is a global leader in making high quality documentaries. This partnership enables our local producers to gain invaluable knowledge and compete globally," he said, adding that one of the documentaries should be completed by Aug 31, in time for the Golden Jubilee celebration of the country's independence.

Rais said the ministry was planning to create a scheme to buy proposals from local filmmakers and help produce more quality documentaries.

"The Government has allocated RM6 million this year for the production of local movies and documentaries but it has not been utilised."

For details on the NGCI-Finas HD Documentary Fund 2006, send e-mail to mok@ngcasia.com.