

Wishes grant-ed for researchers

Award gives duo chance to go further in chosen fields

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KUALA LUMPUR: They are blazing the academic trail for the young in the hopes that more children would get off their pop culture obsession and turn to science.

Young researchers Dr Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam, 34, and Dr Natrah Fatin Mohd Ikhsan, 33, were announced as the pioneer recipients for the Merdeka Award Grant for International Attachment and will be working with world renowned scientists in their fields during a three-month networking programme.

The award provides short term grants for Malaysians aged 22 to 35 to engage in collaborative projects with international host institutions in their field of expertise.

Dr Abhimanyu and Dr Natrah, a geneticist and microbial ecologist, respectively, hopes to break new ground in their research and share their experience to get more people interested in science.

"It's sort of my small, little battle with reality TV and talentless talent like Kim Kardashian, who unfortunately dominates our conversation today. Getting more people to be into things that matter," said Dr Abhimanyu who specialises in bladder cancer research.

The Perdana University Graduate School of Medicine assistant professor said the grant would allow him to focus on finding new markers for diagnosing and treating the disease.

"Bladder cancer is one of the

areas that has been poorly studied. So I feel that I can really make a difference in this," he said.

Dr Natrah said she hoped to play a part in drawing attention to agriculture.

"I want to reach out and ignite a passion for science and agriculture by sharing the experiences this attachment provides," she said.

The Universiti Putra Malaysia aquaculture department senior lecturer said her grant would centre around working with groups for research on interaction between microorganisms.

The duo were presented the awards by Regent of Perak Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, who is the Merdeka Award board of trustees chairman, during a ceremony at the Malaysian Petroleum Club yesterday.

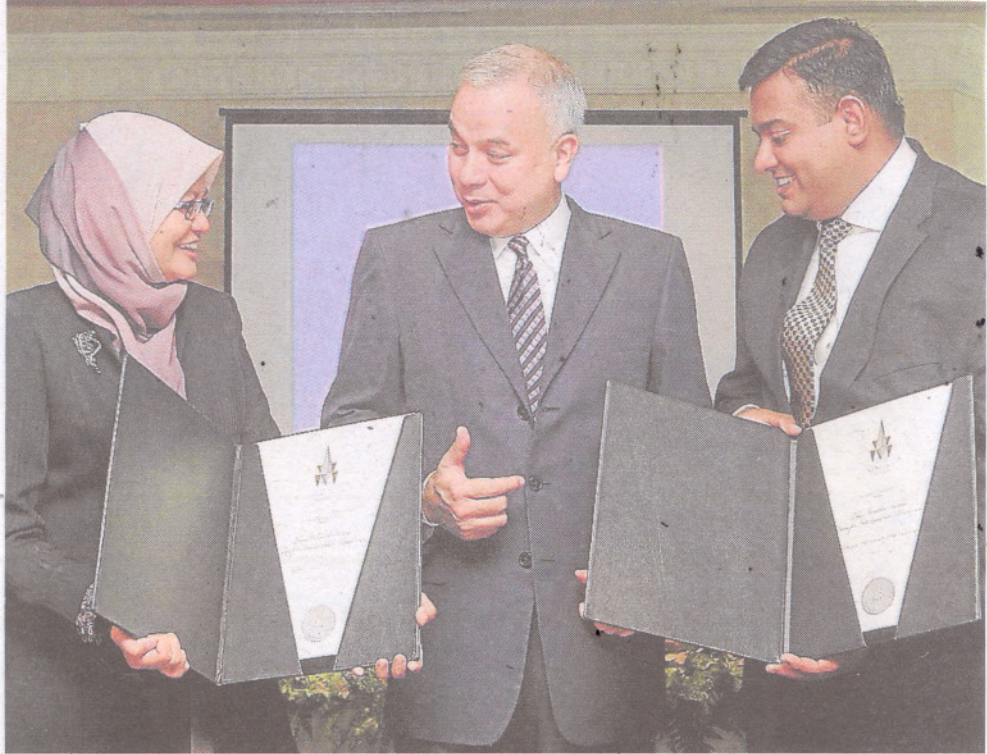
Merdeka Award secretariat executive director Joseph Edwin said Dr Abhimanyu and Dr Natrah stood out from a pool of 60 applicants for "personifying the spirit of Merdeka".

"When I say that, I mean the pioneering spirit of wanting to achieve, which was what our forefathers had some 50 years ago," he said.

Joseph added that applications for the 2013/2014 cycle of the Merdeka Award Grant for International Attachment was now open.

"People of any professional field, be it science, arts and even sports can apply," he said.

For more information, visit www.merdekaaward.my. The closing date for applications is Oct 31.



Well done: Dr Natrah and Dr Abhimanyu chatting with Raja Dr Nazrin (centre) during the award ceremony at the Malaysian Petroleum Club.