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Varsities to get billions for fundamental research

■ By Hamidah Atan
news@nst.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: The government has set aside billions in Ninth Malaysia Plan allocations for fundamental research by local universities.

The Higher Education Ministry has given out RM239 million to be spent on specific and relevant researches, while the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry has allocated RM1.2 billion and RM1.5 billion for the science and technology funds respectively.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin yesterday said "whatever it is, the research must be relevant to industrial needs, knowledge and current needs".

"We want all universities to upgrade or enhance research and development in all areas, such as natural gas or energy.

"One of the criteria they

must consider is the relevance of the project or research to the industries. Fundamental and energy crisis researches are already being carried out in most of the universities in collaborations with private companies such as Proton Holdings Bhd and Petronas Bhd.

"Research on solar energy is being actively undertaken by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. All these are relevant to the current energy crisis we are facing," he told a press conference to explain the progress report of the national higher education strategic plan for the period between August 2007 and June 2008.

The strategic plan was launched last year by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Under the plan's third thrust, enhancement of research and innovation, four universities — Universiti Ma-

laya, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Kehangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia — have been recognised as research universities.

On the enrolment for both public and local universities and colleges, Khaled said the number had increased by 13.3 per cent, from 748,130 in 2006 to 847,485 last year.

He also revealed an increase in the number of National Higher Education Corporation (PTPTN) loan borrowers from 949,527 in 2006 to 1,110,091 last year.

Borrowers paid back a total of RM294,754,200 last year, against RM192,499,700 in 2006. Since early this year, a total of RM87,886,400 had been collected.

Khaled also said he would announce the new service fee on PTPTN loans next week. The charge at present is three per cent of the loan amount.