

RI not giving enough toward research and development

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Indonesia is at the bottom of the list of Asian countries that contribute to research and development activities -- leaving the archipelago to increasingly look toward private companies to fill the philanthropic gap.

While the average allocation for R&D in Asia is 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), Indonesia was in 2005 only able to allocate 0.05 percent of GDP.

So although there is increasing opposition to the newly enacted Corporation Law, which asks all private companies outside the financial sector to increase their commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities -- it seems all Indonesian companies need to start behaving in a more philanthropic manner.

Set up by conglomerate Sukanto Tanoto, the Tanoto Foundation is a good example of how an Indonesian organization can contribute to society.

The foundation recently awarded its Tanoto Foundation Professorship Award, worth Rp 1.2 billion (US\$130,000), to two Indonesian professors. The grant will enable both scientists to continue their respective technological research programs.

A professor at the Faculty of Forestry at the Yogyakarta-based Gadjah Mada University, Widyastuti received her award in March.

She said she would use her grant to finance research on ganoderma fungus -- a germ that can damage the roots or stems of plants.

And in a simple ceremony Monday at the Institute of Technology of Bandung, foundation chairman Ibrahim Hasan presented the second award to Prof. Dr. Herri Susanto.

"The Tanoto Foundation is committed to help the acceleration of research and development activities at the universities," said Ibrahim during the ceremony.

Amid global warming problems and the scarcity of the supply of oil and gas and other non-renewable energy, Indonesia needs to find alternative energy sources.

With more R&D activities, Ibrahim said he believed Indonesia would be able to produce affordable alternative energy.

As a professor of chemical engineering, Susanto said he would use the foundation's money to continue researching biomass gasification technology as an alternative energy source.

He has been able to produce an electricity engine using corn stems, rice and wood waste as fuel.

The "gasifier machine" was put to use for a short while in Indramayu, West Java, but villagers were reluctant to use it further because the technology was too complicated.

The professor also said the technology was not yet economically viable.

He said he needed to research further the hazardous tar and carbon monoxide (CO) gases caused by the fuel mix.

"We can save at least Rp 6.4 million per month if we are able to produce at least 57 KW per month," Susanto said.