KUALA LUMPUR: Thirty-nine Malaysians have received the opportunity of a lifetime to pursue postgraduate studies in Britain under the prestigious Chevening scholarship programme.

They were selected from a pool of some 800 applicants, said British High Commissioner to Malaysia Charles Hay, who advised them to not only study hard but to also widen their horizons.

“A British education is undeniably world class, and is very much sought after. This year, 39 outstanding Malaysians will be in the United Kingdom to pursue a master's degree.

“A bit of advice to the new scholars, wherever you come from, study hard, work hard and achieve. Please take the opportunity to travel a bit in the UK, get to know the culture, and go to the further reaches of the British Isles,” Hay said at a pre-departure briefing and reception for the scholars at his official residence here yesterday.

He said the Chevening scholarship, of which Malaysia is the second largest recipient in Asean, reflected Malaysia’s close relationship with Britain.

The Star journalist Natasha Joibi, 31, who is attached to the Kota Kinabalu bureau, is among the scholarship recipients.

Natasha, who is from Penampang, Sabah, will be pursuing a master’s degree in equality and human rights at the University of Glasgow.

“What I expect from this programme is to learn more about my areas of interest, which is journalism and human rights. Upon coming back, I would like to do more investigative work on the issue of sexual abuse against women and children in rural areas. At the same time, I would like to inspire my fellow journalists who are interested in investigative human rights journalism to go for it,” said Natasha, who got the scholarship on her second attempt at applying.

Kaviyarasu Elangkovan, 25, wanted the scholarship to further his interest in the area of Islamic finance, which he said both countries could potentially work together on.

“It’s a prestigious scholarship that consists of a network of future young leaders. I succeeded on my third attempt at applying. My mother burst into tears when we found out that I got selected. I will be leaving this Saturday and I’m excited, nervous and extremely grateful,” said the finance associate from Putrajaya.

Nadia Nicole Abd Halim, 29, is looking forward to a career in either teaching or policy making once she returns to Malaysia.

“I would very much like to learn more about the brain, and how it reacts to learning, especially for students with learning difficulties. Studying in the UK is definitely an opportunity of a lifetime, and for me, going abroad has always been a dream. I believe that through this opportunity, I can sharpen my skills,” said Nadia, who has been a teacher for four years.

Nadia, from Kelana Jaya, Selangor, will be pursuing a master’s degree in education (neuroscience and education) at the University of Bristol.

The Chevening Scholarship is the British government’s global scholarship programme funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In addition to government funding, corporate partners that support the scholarship include the CIMB Group Holdings Bhd, the Prudence Foundation (the community investment arm of Prudential), Yayasan Khazanah, the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation and British universities.

Scholarship applications for the academic year 2020/2021 are now open, with more details at chevening.org/malaysia.