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More perks for dons (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government is expected to increase the maximum salaries of academicians by as much as 150 per cent in its bid to arrest the brain drain from institutions of higher learning.

According to sources, the maximum salary for senior professors would likely be increased from RM7,110 to RM19,809, RM5,194 to RM8,749 for associate professors, and RM4,321 to RM7,007 for lecturers.

The academicians are expected to get the new salaries after their universities have been corporatised. A Bill for the purpose is expected to be tabled in the current session of Parliament.

The Education Ministry sources said that although subsidies for the universities' operational costs might be reduced gradually from 98 per cent to at least 70 per cent after the corporatisation, government assistance would remain a permanent fixture.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said it was too early to disclose details of the corporatisation plan but acknowledged that there was a need to formulate a new salary scheme to stop the brain drain.

The scheme, he said, should be totally independent of the Public Service Department, adding that it was also to attract the best brains in the country.

On fees, he said poor students had no reason to worry.

He gave his assurance that fees would remain well within the means of the general public, as any increase would be almost negligible and very gradual.

"Although subsidies will be reduced, the Government will not withdraw them entirely," Najib said. "And contrary to general opinion, students will not feel any backlash from the corporatisation of universities. It is important for people not to liken the concept of corporatisation in this context to that of privatisation."

He said it should be seen as "part corporatisation and part separation" from the Government.

Universities will remain as statutory bodies, with no change to their legal status.

Although Najib did not disclose details, it is understood that the fees for the next two academic years will not be increased.

Which means the fees will remain at RM1,020 per semester for Arts courses, RM1,400 for Technology, RM1,800 for Medicine, RM1,100 for Law, Business Administration and Accounting, RM1,240 for Pure Science, and RM1,320 for Applied Science.

It is also understood that professors who secure sponsorships for their projects can also expect gains when universities are corporatised.

Now they are not allowed to earn commissions.

In addition, academic staff can also start thinking about bonuses and incentives.

It is understood that the ministry will submit a proposal at the Cabinet meeting next week for approval in the current session of Parliament.

In January last year, Parliament had approved amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971, paving the way for the corporatisation of all universities.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said in September that the corporatisation was inevitable because of the outflow of academic

staff to the private sector for better salaries and perks.

He had said the Government had no choice but to turn universities into commercial institutions to check the brain drain.

It was also to enable them to develop a more flexible management system and run programmes with greater autonomy while remaining accountable to the Government.

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