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Najib-Students

APPLICATION OF FOREIGN STUDENT PASSES SIMPLIFIED

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 23 (Bernama) -- Effective January 2, foreign students pursuing higher education in this country need no longer obtain Malaysian student visa in the country of their origin and required to have only the normal travel document, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said.

He said the application of student visa for foreign students would be handled by the respective public or private institutions of higher learning (IPTA or IPTS) and after obtaining approval from the Immigration Department, the foreign students concerned would be informed of their application.

He said that the foreign students would be issued the student passes on arrival in Malaysia.

"The IPTA and IPTS concerned would make the necessary applications for the students and after scrutiny by the Immigration Department and if the application is in order, approval for the student passes would be given to the respective IPTA and IPTS," he told reporters after the weekly post-cabinet meeting at his ministry.

He said with the move the procedure for obtaining immigration documents for foreign students pursuing higher education in the country would be faster and easier, that is within two weeks.

Najib said he had been informed of the new procedure by Immigration Director-General Datuk Aseh Che Mat and it had been approved by Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Under the old procedure, a foreign student would have to obtain the student visa at the Malaysian embassy or representative office in his or her country of origin before coming here.

The process took a long time and was inconvenient and expensive for the foreign student as the Malaysian representative office was not found in all places, he said.

Najib said the Immigration Department used computers to process and keep statistics and records of foreign students studying in Malaysia.

He said each IPTA and IPTS were also required to sign a guarantee and be responsible for the foreign students and their behaviour.

He expressed confidence that efforts to turn Malaysia into a centre for educational excellence in the region would receive better response besides encouraging more foreign students to seek further education in Malaysia.

He said that according to Immigration Department statistics, the number of foreign students in the country increased significantly from 5,635 in 1986 to 9,075 in 1997.

Up to October, there were 11,733 foreign students pursuing higher studies in the country and the number was expected to rise further.

Indonesia had the largest number of students here followed by China, Singapore, India, Japan, Korea, Bangladesh, Maldives and Brunei.

Najib hoped the new procedure would solve the problems posed by agents charging exorbitant fees to handle the application for passes as was the case in China.

He said the Immigration Department would brief the IPTA and IPTS on the new procedures and issue circulars to the state Immigration Departments, Immigration Attaches and Malaysian Representative Offices abroad.

On the ministry's move requiring pre-university students to sit for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) although a pass is not compulsory, he said there were actually differences of opinion on the matter.

He said the government felt that passing the MUET was not compulsory in the early stages but the test was necessary to ensure that students and the schools laid emphasis on the importance of the English language.

MUET also aimed to assess the level of understanding of English language among students and to strengthen the system of education for English language.

Asked whether the government would make it compulsory to pass the MUET in future, Najib said it would be reviewed in stages and according to the situation.

"We must be sensitive to the issue and look at the performance (in mastering the English language) in the rural areas, don't think of the urban areas only. We will implement (the compulsory pass) when the situation allows it and we have to be fair to all parties," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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