

NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL EXTRACTS  
30 MARCH 1998

The decision by the government not to recall more than 12,000 sponsored students abroad despite the country's economic problems, as announced by the Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohammad Najib Tun Razak over the weekend drew comment from the NEW STRAITS TIMES.

Calling it a pragmatic solution the daily says the decision is to be applauded because it reflects the government's sensitivity to the plight of these students.

"The daily notes that originally the government had intended to recall all the students it is sponsoring abroad, with the exception of those who are pursuing courses at the elite ivory towers, and place them in local institutions of higher learning.

"Naturally, the prospect of being recalled mid-way through their studies would certainly add a mental strain. Even if such measure is characterised as absolutely necessary in view of the economic problems, it does not mean that its implementation is without adverse effects to the students", it says

The daily agrees that during times of economic hardship tough choices have to be made. "But surely, these choices should be tempered with pragmatism", it says.

The Straits Times also described as a sensible move Najib's announcement that by the year 2001, the government would only sponsor about 400 students abroad to study in tier-1 university such as Oxford or Cambridge.

"All the fine talk about making this country the regional centre of excellent tertiary education is pointless if we continue to send our students overseas", it says.

"It is possible to ride out the present economic problem without any damage to the country's investments in human resources development. By reducing the number of students at the tertiary level, we will be condemning the country to a mediocre economic future", it says.

The daily also feels there is still hope for those with limited financial income to take up tertiary education. "The establishment of the National Higher Education Fund, a government initiative, is designed to assist cash-strapped students in obtaining loans.

"That the Inland Revenue Board has been empowered to act as agent for the recovery of the loans will ensure there will be no defaulters.

"It is a sensible move since education loans should not be a free ride at the expense of the taxpayers", the New Straits Times says.

Writing on the same subject BERITA HARIAN says sponsored students must surely welcome the government's decision not to recall them.

To call them back after half way, will only pose another big problem, says the daily.

The paper says, although it will be a heavy burden to the government, it is also the government's responsibility to see them through.

Berita Harian hopes the students will appreciate the government's decision.

They can show their appreciation by studying hard and achieving excellent results in their studies, the daily says.

UTUSAN MALAYSIA says the reminder by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that UMNO may lose the general election if it failed to uphold the party's clean image, should be given attention by all members.

"It is only proper that the party president expresses his anxiety

because certain members are too eager in fighting for posts in the current party divisional elections.

"UMNO members should realise that non-members are also very important in choosing the government.

"Although most of the party divisions have completed their meetings and elected leaders yesterday (Sunday), it is still not too late for members to clean their houses and get rid of bad elements that can destroy the party's image".

UTUSAN says UMNO will be holding elections for the Supreme Council posts next year and the general election will soon follow. It is therefore, the right time for the party members to strengthen ties with each other for the of the party unity.

"Now that the elections at divisional level is almost over, attention should be given to closing the rank and forge to maintain the party's good image especially among non-members.

"UMNO members should realise that the people is very sensitive of current issues. Issue like the water shortage in the Klang Valley can cause the people to question the credibility of the their representatives.

"All members should therefore, heed the president's advice to prove to the people that UMNO is, indeed, the champion of their cause", Utusan says.

TAMIL NESAN advises the people, especially the people of Penang, not to believe in rumour about the temple-mosque issue in Kampung Rawa.

It can spark anger and anxiety among people and may lead to racial disharmony, the daily warns.

"Some opportunists with vested interests are spreading the rumour to create racial disharmony", the paper says.

"The misunderstanding has been settled amicably with the intervention of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"However, certain irresponsible elements are trying to fish in troubled water with the aim of creating animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims.

"The people should not let the rumours destroy the unity, harmony and goodwill among the various races which have practice religious tolerance all this time.

"They should not be overcome by emotions but should instead, maintain unity and religious tolerance for a peaceful life", the paper says.

Current water woes in the Federal Territory and Selangor again is a main topic of discussion in Nanyang Siang Pau's editorial column.

The daily hopes a high level meeting among officers of the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department, Selangor Waterworks Department, Kuala Lumpur Cityhall and representatives of Puncak Niaga and IWK to be chaired by DPM Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today could come up with a long term formula to overcome the problem.

The current dry spell, as pointed out by experts, is not the sole cause of critical water shortage in the Klang Valley. Mismanagement and lack of proficiency on the part of a privatised water company, and absence of effective coordinations among the respective local authorities, environment department and waterworks department, particularly in curbing pollution of the Hulu Langat river, are contributing factors.

Unrestrained development of land at water catchment areas and illegal operations of factories along the river bank further jeopardised the quality of water resources.

The paper suggests that water pollution alert groups be formed to check pollution in catchment areas.

It also urges the cabinet to consider seriously the proposed setting up of a national water supply committee to coordinate and facilitate transmission of water from one state to another in case of a shortage.

Members of the public must be to El Nino factor, Tata Tea has estimated that its production would less at 56 million kg.

BERNAMA

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