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No recall of students (HL)

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GUAR CHEMPEDAK, Sat. - The Government will not recall 12,794 sponsored students studying overseas despite the economic problems.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the students, a majority of whom were in their final year, included those sponsored by the ministry, Public Service Department, Mara, Petronas, Syarikat Telekom Malaysia Berhad any Tenaga Nasional Berhad.

He said the decision was taken after a recent meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed.

"The decision took into account the fact that we have stopped sending students overseas this year, saving us RM135 million.

"Furthermore, recalling students who are almost completing their education may adversely affect their academic performance," he told reporters after opening the Yan Umno divisional delegates' meeting today.

Of the 12,794 students, 4,312 are sponsored by the Public Service Department, the ministry and Mara in universities in the UK and 1,783 in the US.

Petronas, Telekom and Tenaga sponsored 2,041 in the two countries while the remaining 4,658 are studying at universities in other countries.

Najib said the ministry expected about 6,500 of the total number studying overseas to return in two years.

He also announced that some 1,000 Malaysians doing their A-levels overseas would be allowed to complete their course.

However, only those who obtained places in tier-one or excellent foreign universities, would be allowed to continue with their degree programmes.

Najib said the Government had also approved an additional allocation of between RM500 million and RM600 million to various ministries to support the students who were completing their studies overseas.

He also said that by 2001, the Government would only sponsor about 400 students to study abroad and only in tier-one universities such as Oxford and Cambridge in the UK.

He said other students would have to do their degrees locally as the cost of education was lower and the quality at par with that of foreign universities.

On postgraduate students, Najib said only those doing dissertations for their Master's degree programmes would be recalled while those following taught Master's programmes would be allowed to continue.

On March 5, Najib announced that public and private universities had allocated 2,305 places for Malaysian students abroad who would have to return due to the economic problems.

The need for more places in local institutions of higher learning had become more acute in view of the economic downturn.

Mara and PSD were previously studying the possibility of recalling some of their scholars and negotiating with several local universities and private institutions for the placement of its students, among them Universiti Malaya and Universiti Tenaga Nasional.

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