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Government should encourage banks to give educational loans

Steve Sung

I FULLY agree with the issue raised by MP Chang See Ten in Parliament which was reported in the New Straits Times on April 14, in relation to the development of a knowledgeable workforce in facing the challenges of the next millennium.

All levels of society should be encouraged to pursue their studies regardless of their age, and incentives should be given to those who are eager to further their studies while undertaking professional obligations in the corporate world.

No doubt, there are many long distance programmes offered by local private colleges and public/private universities according to Chang but, unfortunately, not many financial institutions are willing to provide financial assistance i.e. educational loans without imposing difficult conditions on the applicants.

For example, certain banks treat study loans like some sort of mortgage whereby the property mortgaged needs to be free from encumbrances or the applicant needs to have a certain sum of fixed deposit in the banks concerned.

Some banks do not provide educational loans at all. Financial institutions should change their mindset on this issue from being merely profit-orientated to civic-conscious corporate citizens.

By assisting the public, the banks will indirectly contribute to nation-building and efforts towards achieving Vision 2020 in creating a "psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society with faith and confidence in itself, justifiably proud of what it is, of what it has accomplished, robust enough to face all manner of adversity and establishing a progressive society that is innovative and forward-looking."

A dynamic society imbued with knowledge through education and practical experience will always form the basis of a resilient nation.

Nowadays, a nation is well respected and emulated by others not because of its size, but because of its great civilisational and philosophical values.

A knowledgeable society will gain strong credentials worldwide, particularly in this age of globalisation.

"Are those who know equal to those who know not? It is only those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition." (Quran 39.9.)

It is a fact that economic wealth today has less to do with production and more to do with the use of knowledge and information.

According to Andrew Gill, a consulting services general manager with DDI Asia Pacific, knowledge workers are fast becoming the intellectual capital of organisations, and the main source of competitive advantage.

The Government, namely the Education Ministry and Finance Ministry, could encourage and allocate incentives to financial institutions to provide educational assistance to the public, particularly those who are seeking self-actualisation in the acquisition of knowledge.

Years ago, Winston Churchill foresaw that "the empires of the future are the empires of the mind."

For organisations that last centuries, we must cultivate our people well.

Hence, I urge financial institutions to start the paradigm shift of creating a "win-win" situation among themselves, the shareholders,

stakeholders and the public.

Finally, I would like to quote a statement by our beloved Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad: "There is a moment in the life of every nation when it is time for the people to take the future in their hands and say, humbly but firmly: We will fulfil our destiny."

God willing, we will be able to build a great nation with the knowledge that we possess through education and development.