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## Review of education loan interest

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SERDANG, Fri. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has directed the Education Ministry to review the four per cent interest charged on National Higher Education Fund loans.

Taking into account the views of students, he said the ministry and the National Higher Education Fund Council would have to study whether the current interest rate was fair.

"I will get the Education Ministry and other relevant agencies to study the rate thoroughly. I will also ask them to study the reasons given by the students why the interest on study loans should be reviewed," he said.

He was speaking after opening the Universiti Putra Malaysia Stadium today.

Earlier, UPM Student Representative Council president Che Zakaria Che Ali handed over a five-page memorandum to Abdullah protesting the four per cent interest on loans to students.

He said the council felt the imposition of interest on such loans was unIslamic, a burden to students and unfair as many students received their money late.

The council also requested the NHEFC to convert loans of students who did well into scholarships

The Government has set aside RM1.3 billion for the NHEFC this year, the same amount it released last year.

Loans under the fund are available to students pursuing first degrees and diplomas at all local public and private higher educational institutions.

Previously, loans under the fund were only available to students at public universities and five private universities - Universiti Telekom Malaysia, Universiti Petronas, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak and International Medical University.

Those pursuing first degrees in science receive RM16,500 a year while arts students get RM16,000.

He was also asked to comment on a foreign report which said the Government was recruiting more Federal Reserve Unit personnel to control street demonstrations.

"I know nothing about that. All I know is that we are recruiting more police personnel to patrol our waters especially in the South China Sea due to the recent kidnapping activities."

On a meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Umno division leaders yesterday, Abdullah said the Umno president explained contemporary issues and those related to the Umno-Pas unity talks.

"It was an important meeting...it's good for all divisional leaders to get briefings on such issues from the president himself."

Abdullah was also asked to comment on a proposal to allow the Anti-Corruption Agency to investigate alleged corrupt practices by aspirants in the upcoming Umno divisional elections.

"If it warrants the ACA to investigate the source of funds...or if there is evidence of bribery or collusion or other suspicious activities, then it can surely take action."

However, Abdullah said as such wrongdoings were still under control, the code of ethics on party election would suffice in dealing with the possible graft menace.

Earlier, Abdullah had a dialogue with UPM's teaching staff.  
Asked to elaborate on issues raised, he said he had told them to review their curriculum to ensure the courses offered were relevant to changing times.

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