

Khaled: Free education is no solution
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By Nicholas Wong

Free education will mean fewer students entering universities, Higher Education Minister Khaled Nordin claims.

Countries that provide free education have a limited number of students entering universities, he told at a press conference today.

NONEThis, Khaled said, was because no country was truly able to afford free education for all.

Citing Morocco as an example, he said there were only 300,000 students in universities, out of a population of 31 million, while Malaysia had more than a million students doing higher education, out of a population of 28 million.

Morocco also has other problems, such as a weak economy and a high unemployment rate, he said.

"Investing in students by giving them free education will not result in the strengthening of the economy or growth in the country," he said.

Trumpeting the National Higher Education Fund (PTPTN), Khaled said the scheme had increased the number of students attending universities in the country.

"Before PTPTN, universities could only manage about 27,000 students (a year). This was in the 1990s.

"After PTPTN... there are about 230,000 students a year entering universities," he told reporters after launching the Universiti Malaya Researchers Conference and the Research Management and Innovation Complex this morning.

Before the scheme was implemented, he said, only students with government scholarships and wealthy or hardworking parents could enter universities.

'How will they manage without PTPTN?'

But after the introduction of the PTPTN loan scheme, the financial burden "shifted from the parents to the children" and students no longer had to worry about paying for their education until they graduated and began working.

"If we give free education, then who is going to pay for the students' living costs? How will they manage without PTPTN?" Khalid questioned, noting that the loan scheme did not just cover tuition fees but also living expenses.

NONEAsked about PKR's five-point framework for abolishing the PTPTN, Khaled said it was just a "political tool" designed to garner support for the opposition party.

It is not easy to set up new universities, as it would require money and expertise, he said in reference to the party's proposal of setting up specific technical universities.

In addition, Khaled criticised the PKR proposed loan system and special fund for students, saying it was just "reinventing the wheel" and redundant because of the PTPTN.

The minister also said that women taking microcredit loans under the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM)

scheme were examples that the students should follow.

Despite they having fewer opportunities and a less assured future than the students, the women had no complaints about their loans and repaid them, he said.

"These are women from all races, earning low incomes and with no education... They were charged interest as much as 10% (for their business loans).

"They had no problem with the interest. They were uneducated but the loans were repaid at a 99.6 percent rate," he added.

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