

The colour of gov't scholarships
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COMMENT When Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak proposed to open scholarship opportunities to all top scorers, particularly those with 9As and above, I saluted the move and thought nothing more of the matter. A politician buckling to give popular tit-bits is nothing new, and at least he's heading in the right direction.

NONE However, it irked me that as usual the Malay-rights group, the Perkasa-led Malay Consultative Council (MPM), responded with "constructive" criticism claiming that 67 percent of the scholarships should be reserved for the Malay community.

My response is this: firstly, Prof Kamaruddin Kachar, not all the 67 percent are Malaysian Malays. Some of them are actually assimilated Indonesians, whose parents hold red MyKads.

Many Malaysians are denied opportunities on the fallacy that they are of the wrong ethnicity and that they are less likely to be "loyal" to Malaysia. Instead, as long as you are a 'Malay', imported or not, you are entitled to a scholarship as well as admittance to heavily-subsidised boarding schools.

I am not saying that despite Malaysian-born students of Indonesian parentage being intelligent enough, they do not deserve scholarships simply by virtue of their parents being 'Malay'. Quite the contrary, hard work and diligence should always be rewarded. I know some of these kids - they've studied hard and they should be rewarded where deserving. I am simply pointing out how our education system discriminates against Malaysians.

Affirmative action, not

I think it is ridiculous that descendants of immigrants are awarded privileges denied to generations born and raised as Malaysians, on the basis of race and religion. The argument that affirmative action policies are meant to help the Malays falls short here. Educational aid for citizens of Malaysia being distributed on the basis of race and religion is sanctioned by the state on no moral or ethical grounds, but on purely the in-group and out-group mentality.

NONE Why help descendants of immigrants while neglecting and disparaging our own, purely because they are different from the accepted "original" settlers of Malaya?

Secondly, many people view further education as the only way to break the cycle of poverty and as a means to achieve social mobility. In short, education is the only way to help provide for your parents and your siblings.

It is the only way you can protect the rights of your family and your property. It is that golden gateway to a better life. The cycle of poverty is not specifically restricted to the Malays in the rural areas.

There are the rural and urban poor, and despite the differences in skin colour, private religious beliefs, and dietary preferences, they are no less human than your average Muhammad. Everyone is the same; we worry about grades, food, shelter, girlfriend/boyfriend, parents, allowances, and etc.

It is our political parties that continuously indoctrinate us into thinking in terms of 'Malay' and 'non-Malay', as 'human' and 'less human', or 'us' and 'them'. There is no reason whatsoever for racial quotas for scholarships to be sanctioned as we are all humans who are essentially the same.

NONETHirdly, as I have observed before, the insistence on preserving the Malays as a community actually celebrates mediocrity. The concept of fear, self-guilt, insecurity and excessive emotional response is propagated through the most dangerous of tools: religion.

Even places of worship such as the surau and the mosque are not exempt from political intrigue. I am sick and tired of watching and listening to beautiful scriptures of the Holy Quran literally taken out of context and manipulated to suit the purposes of the elite, wealthy, and privileged to maintain their power base. I know I shouldn't be surprised, the scripts are all written and approved by the state's religious body, but it does make it more questionable, does it not?

Hatred more populist

It is no secret that as a collective, humans are fairly obtuse. The common sense of the pacifist few often escapes them, and therefore the masterful skill of the other few who promulgate hatred, suspicion, and utter ignorance carries more conviction as truth than the message of universal love and harmony.

sedaq protest against penang government 050210 ibrahim ali speech 02How Malays love their drama enam petang. The ever-present threat of imaginary enemies was created by hate-mongers to divert blame and responsibility from themselves.

Fourthly, I do not see this as a point of conflict for anyone affected by the change of policies. The way I see it, the Malay boys and girls will instead be told that they actually deserve the grades that they acquired through their own sweat and midnight candle-burning, being told to have self-esteem. They will be told that they can do whatever they set their mind to, without the need for crutches at all to achieve their dreams and help their families.

dap scholarship for top scorer memo at pm office 180509 01The only people who dramatise an otherwise positive move for all youths in this country alike, are people who feel threatened by the lack of dependence and growing confidence of the previously downtrodden majority, those who feel that to keep being relevant, they need to bully and put others down in their places so that they can feel better about themselves.

Finally, I recommend several criteria as the basis for federal scholarships. Scholarships should only be dealt out to members of the lower-middle to poverty-level students who exhibit excellent co-curricular achievements as well as reasonably good grades. A well-balanced individual is the best product that could be produced by only the best of institutions.

Disqualify upper-middle class

Students from these demographics tend to appreciate their education more, and the public will know their taxpayer monies have been well spent. Furthermore, the upper-middle class and above should be completely disqualified from eligibility for these scholarships, and should instead be encouraged to take up PTPTN or consider other financial options. Most of them can afford private education, anyway.

sad and disappointed students June 4 Penang scholarships hrp Another favourite suggestion by a friend of mine is to completely do away with overseas scholarships and force everyone to study in local universities.

The precious few brainy ones who go abroad may choose never to return, given the socio-political circumstances in Malaysia. The savings can be better used to improve dilapidated Tamil and Orang Asli primary or secondary schools or increase the salaries of long-suffering teachers.

For the record, I turned down scholarships because I genuinely believed that it should go to people who really need them. I find it unfair that students who can afford original Guess, DKNY and Chanel were also awarded scholarships, when they obviously need it not.

In conclusion, I truly believe in federal scholarships for those who deserve them on merit and based on their family's financial background. Any thoughts, anyone?

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