

**DPM: Anwar's idea not feasible**

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*EASY TO SAY: Plan to abolish PTPTN will only benefit the elite*

IT is irresponsible for opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to suggest using Petronas' revenues to pay off the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loans.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the opposition had run out of ideas and would say anything because it was not the government.

"It is easy to say that there is no need to repay the loans.

"Of course, some people who took the loans will be happy but that will cause problems to the government.

"Anwar can talk, as he does not have any responsibility. If we squeeze Petronas dry and it cannot invest, then how will it generate money for other things? He never thinks," said Muhyiddin, adding that the idea was not feasible.

Speaking after attending a dialogue session on the national education system yesterday, Muhyiddin said the government had a good plan for the PTPTN, where borrowers only started repaying when they began working.

The opposition coalition had recently promised to abolish PTPTN loans and provide Malaysians with free higher education should it come to power.

In Kuantan, Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal said the opposition's plan will only benefit the elite while those from the low-income households will be deprived of an opportunity to pursue their studies at universities.

Shafie said PTPTN had helped outstanding students from rural areas to further their studies at universities and if the loan was scrapped, they would be affected.

"The loans are provided to students of all races who deserve it.

"PTPTN helps to ease the burden faced by parents from the lower-income groups, who have to dig deep into their pockets to support their children at universities," he said near here.

Pas central working committee member Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said yesterday the free education plan was not a Pakatan Rakyat policy framework and there was no unanimous stand on it yet.

"I was reminded by my party leadership that it is not yet a common policy framework of PR but for the time being, it is the aspirations of a particular party and individuals."

In principle, he said Pas went along with the idea but emphasised that the issue would be subject to the decision-making process in PR before it became policy.

"Details need to be ironed out to see whether the idea is sustainable and doable, then proposed and tabled at the PR presidential council meeting."

Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) strategic director Rafizi Ramli confirmed that the idea was still being discussed at the party level. He said the party's leadership was going through the mechanism and options available.

Pas vice-president Husam Musa said the idea of the RM43 billion loan being settled in one go was misleading.

He said writing off of the loan need not be implemented in one move but could be done in stages following PTPTN's usual payment schedule.

RAM Holdings Berhad group chief economist Dr Yeah Kim Leng said funds had to be derived from other sources of revenue if the debts of PTPTN borrowers were to be written off.

He said the debt's sizeable amount would impose a tremendous burden on government finances.

"There is a huge trade off, especially in financing future educational opportunities.

"It may not be a wise move, considering that these PTPTN borrowers would be in a position to repay the debt if they secured jobs.

"To write off their loans would be unfair to taxpayers," Yeah said.

Former Universiti Putra Malaysia Students Representative Council president Iqbal Ismat Nordin, 22, believed that abolishing the PTPTN loan was simply part of the opposition's agenda.

"We are not gullible. As a student, we understand that higher learning education is not the equivalent of primary or secondary schools free education.

Iqbal, who was also a PTPTN borrower, said he understood the terms and conditions of the loan and had no problems in repaying the loan. Additional reporting by Eunice Au and Emilia Gazali.

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