

Rafizi: Undo higher education liberalisation to ensure nation's future
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SHAH ALAM, April 11 — Putrajaya should go back to its pre-1996 policy of providing universal higher education to all eligible Malaysians and not abdicate this responsibility to the private sector, Rafizi Ramli said yesterday.

The PKR strategic director stressed that the prioritisation of private tertiary institutes (IPTs) has increased the financial burden on students as the "commercial element" involved meant fees would be marked up 200 to 300 per cent.

This situation would only worsen in years to come due to the growing demand for IPTs, which existed because the Barisan Nasional (BN) government had failed to provide enough places for Malaysians in public universities (IPTA), he said.

Rafizi pledged that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will establish 10 more IPTAs with an extra 100,000 places should it come to power, which would take up 80 to 90 per cent of demand from school leavers.

IPTs admissions have exceeded that of IPTAs because BN has not invested any money in new institutions, he claimed.

"Do we have money to build universities to ensure everyone who is eligible gets a place? Yes," he said at a forum on higher education loans (PTPTN) at Quality Hotel here.

A percentage of contributions from state oil firm Petronas could be channelled towards the creation of IPTAs, Rafizi said.

He noted that the country's oil and gas reserves would last for another 20 to 25 years, and that Malaysia has to make the most of this finite resource to reform the education sector before it was too late.

"Malaysia is the only country in the world where revenue from oil is not placed in a fund to build capacity but is used to pay wages and go on holidays..." he said.

"There is not a single commitment or new investment in IPTAs because that's BN's policy. BN's policy is to slowly give everything to the private sector."

Petronas contributions can also be used to pay for about 90 per cent of tuition and accommodation fees for students at IPTAs, Rafizi said.

"If you look after these two aspects, I think you will take up 90 per cent of the costs and the remaining 10 per cent will not be so burdensome," he said.

He said the introduction of new public universities would also force the current private institutes to specialise in courses and consolidate, leaving only world-class IPTs and not those housed in "shoplots".

He added that students who wished to pursue further studies at IPTSs will not be abandoned under PR rule as bursaries would be provided for exactly that purpose.

The PR pact has pledged to provide free education to all eligible Malaysians should they come to federal power and has also promised to abolish PTPTN.

The Najib administration, however, has charged that such a policy will bankrupt the nation.

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