

Student groups give support to Bersih 3.0
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 16 — Student activists groups will join the April 28 Bersih 3.0 rally in a bid to bring about a change in government they say is needed to realise free tertiary education.

In a joint press conference, Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM) and anti-Umno group Solidariti Anak Muda Malaysia (SAMM) said today they will unite to ensure the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) is abolished.

SAMM chairman Badrul Hisham Shaharin said the present Barisan Nasional (BN) government was ignoring the needs of the people by continuing with the federal education loan scheme that critics say is saddling fresh graduates with debt.

“Everyone knows that PTPTN has an interest system that will only burden the people, so why does the government continue with this?” the Rembau PKR chief asked at a press conference with several SMM leaders here today.

SMM treasurer Adam Adli Abdul Halim urged the young to support Bersih and to use channels such as social media to voice their demands to the government.

“We urge all Malaysian youths to come forward and voice out in any way to show solidarity in demanding free and fair elections,” he said.

Bersih will hold its third rally for free and fair elections on April 28, saying it is necessary to warn Malaysians that the country is about to face its “dirtiest” polls to date.

The federal opposition has been promoting free education and pushing for the PTPTN to be abolished, insisting that the government could cover the country’s education bill with oil profits, and by reducing corruption and plugging leakages in the administration.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) strategists told The Malaysian Insider last weekend it will meet this week to fine-tune its policy solution for funding tertiary education in hopes of winning over Malays in their 20s, who make up one-sixth of the voting population.

The meet comes ahead of a key debate between PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin this May 3 on whether the PTPTN scheme should be discontinued.

Opposition leader Anwar has led the line in calling for the end of PTPTN, which critics say has saddled many fresh graduates with heavy debt, even before they are gainfully employed.

During a demonstration at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday by about 500 student activists calling for free education, PKR vice presidents Nurul Izzah Anwar and Chua Tian Chang both rallied the crowd by declaring that “free education is a right for all.”

PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli has spoken at roundtables and written an exhaustive blog post about how the RM6.1 billion disbursed through PTPTN last year can instead be used to fully fund an additional 100,000 places in public universities as well as the existing 372,000 places.

Speaking to The Malaysian Insider, he insisted that the government did not need to recoup this amount back as PTPTN has only collected RM2.8 billion since being established 15 years ago, about 10 per cent of the loans disbursed so far.

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