

**Only RM5b more annually for free tertiary education, says Anwar**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**April 18, 2012**  
**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 18 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) insisted today it would only cost an extra RM5 billion annually to give free tertiary education in response to accusations that its plan to abolish a federal higher education loan scheme would bankrupt the country.

The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), which has come under pressure from student activists to abolish the National Higher Education Fund (PTPTN), has insisted that the suggestion would cost RM43 billion.

But Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told a press conference the “democratisation of access to quality education” would only cost RM5 billion.

“Can’t we afford RM5 billion more? What about the tens of billions that are lost through contracts awarded without open tender? The RM19 billion in subsidies to independent power producers?” he said.

The Malaysian Insider reported last week the federal opposition is set to make higher education reform a key policy to win the hearts of young Malays, a demographic it believes will make up the bulk of fence-sitters in the coming polls.

Today’s leadership meeting made further steps towards fine-tuning 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.

It also came ahead of a key debate between PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli and Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin this May 3 on whether the PTPTN (National Higher Education Fund Corporation) federal student loan scheme should be discontinued.

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.

Over 500 student activists gathered at Dataran Merdeka last weekend calling for a change in government they say is needed for the public to be given their “right to free education.”

PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli later explained to The Malaysian Insider that the RM5 billion figure included RM3 billion to cover existing fees paid by undergraduates in public universities as well as to create more places so students will not be forced to enrol in more expensive private institutions.

He said another RM2 billion would be used over 10 years or more to write off PTPTN loans which the opposition insists only amounts to RM24.7 billion.

The Najib administration has projected revenue this year at RM186.9 billion, with a deficit of RM45.9 billion, or 4.7 per cent of the GDP.

PR insisted in its shadow budget last October it will be able to rein in deficit to 4.4 per cent with a revenue of RM181 billion and expenditure of RM220 billion.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/only-rm5b-more-annually-for-free-tertiary-education-says-anwar/>