

PTPTN: Hope For Needy In Educational Excellence
Bernama
April 30, 2012
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 30 (Bernama) -- A mother of nine has expressed fears that a proposal by the opposition to abolish the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loan scheme will deprive needy students of an opportunity to further their education.

Nor Asiah Senik, 59, said it was impossible for parents in a situation such as hers to finance their children's education to a higher level and ensure a better livelihood for them if the scheme was shelved.

In this regard, needy families would remain at a disadvantage, she noted.

"For those who can afford, it would not be an issue. But shouldn't our children too, be accorded the opportunity to go to university or college?," she asked when interviewed by Bernama here recently.

She surmised it was therefore, not fair if the poor were not allowed such benefits as the PTPTN, while scholarships were only available for students who achieved excellence in their results.

According to former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the PTPTN was introduced in 1997, when Anwar was finance minister and deputy prime minister.

Pos Malaysia retiree Ismail Mohd Shariman, 68, said he managed to send two of his five children to study at Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) in Gombak through the PTPTN.

"Being retired, we can't even guarantee that we can fully support the family, let alone pay for our children's university education," he said, adding that abolishing the PTPTN and proposing "higher education for free" was easier said than done.

"I don't look at the PTPTN repayment obligation as something heartless. Afterall, the practice of borrowing and repaying has already been entrenched as a culture among people," he said.

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Dungun social science lecturer Che Hamdan Mohamed Razali agrees with Ismail.

"The government needs to set its priorities in managing the country's finance and expenditure. "Education is of fundamental importance. Hence, why the PTPTN is crucial, to produce the necessary human capital to spur the country's economic growth," he said.

He anticipates a consequence in which the next generation at large will no longer be at liberty to reach educational excellence and their potential left unexploited, while the country resorts to importing skilled manpower.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had earlier, emphasised that should the PTPTN be abolished and Malaysia provided higher education for free like in Norway, the government would be forced to impose higher taxes on the population.

Currently, the government has to bear the greater burden of between 85 and 95 per cent of the higher education costs, while the PTPTN loans comprise a small percentage.

As statistics show, as at Dec 31, last year, 11,764 students were exempted from repaying their loans by virtue of their achieving first-class degrees or the equivalent.

The amount totalled RM339.07 million and has no limit or quota.

The exemption involved 8,702 students at public institutions of higher learning and 3,062 students of private institutions of higher learning, comprising 2,347 Malays, 8,188 Chinese, 456 Indians and 114 others, including those from Sabah and Sarawak.

The concession was ceased in 2005 due to financial constraints but re-introduced on Jan 1, 2010 on the government's initiative to recognise students who achieved educational excellence.

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