

**Khairy: Pakatan's Buku Jingga, free education pledge will bankrupt Malaysia**  
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SHAH ALAM, May 23 — Abolishing the national higher education loan scheme and implementing all of Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) Buku Jingga policies will bleed RM188 billion annually from federal coffers and bankrupt the country, Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin has said.

The Rembau MP, speaking during last night's lively debate with PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli, ran down the federal opposition's plans, pointing out that the country's annual Budget for this year is merely RM233 billion.

"In total, if we calculate all of PR's promises of the moon and the stars, we will have to spend RM188 billion in one year alone. And what is the size of our Budget, ladies and gentlemen? RM233 billion.

"You deduct that from the Budget and we only get RM45 billion remaining.

"To pay the salaries of our civil servants alone, we need to spend RM52 billion... so we would not even be able to afford paying the salaries of our civil servants," the fiery youth leader thundered during the late night debate aired live on Astro Awani.

"Our country will become a bankrupt nation. You do not believe me? Then look at Greece in Europe. And for your information, Saudara Rafizi, Greece is among the few nations that offers free education."

Khairy had earlier derived the RM188 billion figure by combining the estimated expenditure a government run by PR would have to incur annually if it were to implement all of its Buku Jingga policies, with the cost of scrapping the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loan scheme and offer free education to all Malaysians.

He claimed that according to Rafizi's own projections, removing the PTPTN would cost the government some RM185 billion, which, if settled in staggered payments over 10 years, would amount to over RM18 billion annually.

"To scrap the PTPTN loan would firstly cost RM30 billion. Then Rafizi has suggested the construction of 10 new universities... This would cost RM2 billion each, judging from the targeted annual enrolment rate of about 10,000 new students," Khairy said.

Adding this to the offer of settling the school fees of students seeking both private and public education would rack up a RM188 billion education bill for the country, he added.

"But you cannot stop here... you have to read this promise along with PR's other Buku Jingga promises because this is a question of the government's sustainability in the future.

"PR's suggestion to scrap toll, for example, would cost between RM30 and RM50 billion to buy up all the concessionaires.

"Then, maintaining the tolls would cost about RM2 billion per year. Free WiFi, RM1.2 billion per year. Cancelling the water concession in Selangor alone would cost RM15 billion.

"Raising oil royalties for Sabah, Sarawak, Terengganu and Kelantan would cost RM12.5 billion. And finally, maintaining a minimum wage of RM4,000 for every household would cost up to RM90 billion," he said.

Based on these projections, said the youth leader, Malaysia would have to spend some RM170 billion to fulfil PR's Buku Jingga promises.

But in his rebuttal, Rafizi disputed Khairy's numbers, and mocked him for being such an expert on PR's Buku Jingga policies.

"I'm the accountant here," he told Khairy.

Rafizi maintained that scrapping the federal loan scheme PTPTN and offering free education to young Malaysians would only cost the government an estimated RM5 billion annually, which he said was a far cry from the billions the country bleeds annually due to corrupt practices.

The RM5 billion figure, he explained, would include RM3 billion to cover existing fees paid by undergraduates in public universities, as well as create more places so students would not be forced to enrol in expensive private institutions.

He added the further RM2 billion annually would be used over the next decade to write off the current PTPTN debts, which he said amounts to some RM24 billion.

"This is not merely an issue about writing off these PTPTN debts but also about taking a look at the country's economic standing and sustainable future.

"This is all linked — why our graduates are unable to service their loans is because of the rising cost of living," he said, pointing out that eventually, it would be the government and taxpayers who would have to bear the country's staggering education loan debt.

Rafizi also drew similarities between Malaysia and the United State's current staggering student loan debt of over US\$2.3 trillion (RM6.9 trillion).

"That is why the central bank of New York has said that if this debt is not cleared, it would pose as a massive stumbling block to the world economy... This problem lies not only here but in many other nations," he said.

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.

But Khairy insisted last night that the suggestion was fabricated by PKR after it began to realise that its support from younger voters have waned significantly.

As such, insisted the Umno Youth chief, abolishing the PTPTN and offering free education were not policies agreed on by PKR's other PR partners, namely DAP and PAS.

Rafizi refuted this later during the debate, however, pointing out that PAS leaders were among the strongest advocates for free education.

The debate ended with a resounding call for another such session, but this time between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/khairy-pakatans-buku-jingga-free-education-pledge-will-bankrupt-malaysia/>