

**University And College Education To Continue To Be Made Affordable - Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the government would continue to provide affordable and high-quality education, besides balancing the people's needs with honing of talents for the future.

He said a good education was important not only because the people should be given the opportunity to expand their knowledge, but also because there was a growing need for skilled manpower in today's rapidly developing economy propelled by information technology.

"There is a clear government role in helping students obtain tertiary education. That's why the Public Service Department scholarships are offered routinely to deserving students to help them achieve their dream of going to a top university or college," he said in his latest entry on his blog, www.1malaysia.com.my Thursday.

Najib said students who were unable to get scholarships, could obtain loans from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) as an alternative.

The prime minister said the PTPTN, having been run for more than a decade since 1997 as a means for students requiring financial assistance to further their studies, had not been without criticism.

He said there had been calls to replace the system with free tertiary education for all as a measure to lessen the burden of repayment for students.

"We have weighed the pros and cons of this - while abolishment does not offer an instant respite to the borrowers still repaying their PTPTN loans, there are other factors to consider.

"Firstly, the abolishment will cost the government RM43 billion in uncollected loans. This money can be used for many important causes to help the rakyat. Besides, the setting up of technical universities offering free education requires significant resources.

"Secondly, the very principle of 100 per cent subsidy for college and university fees is one that few countries have followed.

"Bear in mind that a good degree is a stepping stone to higher earnings, and that the taxes of some of the lower-income households in our society contribute to that stepping stone," he said.

Najib said the government, recognising that debt was an issue of concern to Malaysians, subsidised 85 to 95 per cent of the tuition costs and the students' living expenses were factored into the PTPTN loans.

He said the government was also committed to helping students to land jobs upon graduation, and those unable to find one yet would not be forced to repay their loans.

"We instead encourage that such students continue their studies and we will provide assistance if they wish to study abroad as an alternative," he added.

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