

A HELPING HAND ALL THE WAY

Financial loans for deserving students have helped change lives.

NO deserving student left behind. That has been the steadfast position of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) since it came into being two decades ago.

As stated on its website, the corporation constantly works towards providing loans for underprivileged students who have gained admission into institutions of higher learning, so that no one is deprived of further education due to financial problems.

This mission echoes the profound words of Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States and whose image is seen on the US\$100 note: "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

The role of PTPTN has impacted ordinary families like the Chin family in Malacca. Three siblings from that family have completed their tertiary education with financial aid from PTPTN.

"It has been a big help," said Jordan Chin, who graduated with a medical degree from University Malaya in October, this year.

Chin, who is third among five siblings, said his elder sister and brother had also benefitted from PTPTN loans. His sister studied dentistry while his brother also went to medical school.

Their 60-year-old father is a farmer; mother is a housewife.

Chin, 24, is now awaiting his housemanship posting. To him, the recent Budget 2018 announcement that the Government would extend the discount for repayment of loans until Dec 31, is an indication of PTPTN's willingness to give a helping hand to the needy.

Among the highlights of Budget 2018 are:

* 20% discount will be given on outstanding debts (for full settlement);

* 10% discount for repayment of at least 50% on the outstanding debt made in a single payment; and 10% for repayment through salary deductions or scheduled direct debit.

* Grace period for loan repayment is extended from six months to 12 months upon completion of studies.



According to Chin, borrowers should be mindful of their repayment schedule.

"They must have a plan on how to repay. Expenses are so high these days. Once you start work, you must have a proper plan," he said.

In that sense, the discount offered under Budget 2018 is a boon for people like him.

Looking back, he acknowledged that it would have been difficult for him to experience university life if he had been without the RM35,000 loan from PTPTN throughout his five-year course.

The loan, he said, had helped him to settle the fees and accommodation cost, among others.

And it was not just the PTPTN loan that had helped him. The book vouchers provided by the Government had come in handy as well.

Under Budget 2018, it was also stated that Form Six students and those in institutions of higher learning will be provided with book vouchers of RM250. This move will benefit about 1.2 million students.

"It was good. I used it to buy medical books," he said, commending the move to provide vouchers instead of cash, which might be used for the wrong reasons.

As for teacher Nor Elaiza Mohd Radzuan, she described the discounts offered under Budget 2018 as a "major effort" by the Government to encourage people to settle their debts with PTPTN.

This was also a way to help other students who need the financial



Happy ending: PTPTN Besut branch general manager Yusniwati Yusof (left) handing a release letter to former polytechnic student Mohd Afez A Rahman, 26, who settled his loan on Oct 30 after getting a 20% discount as provided for under Budget 2018. — Bernamapic

BENEFITS FOR BORROWERS:

- Discount
 - > 20% - full settlement
 - > 10% - at least 50% repayment in a single payment
 - > 10% - salary deductions or scheduled direct debit repayment.
- Repayment grace period
 - > Extended from 6 months to 12 months upon completion of studies

As of March 2017

Loan recipients
2,668,966

Total amount
RM49.6bil

Students granted exemption from repayment due to good grades
42,904

aid to pursue their courses, she said.

"It's an on-going process," she added.

The 39-year-old Nor Elaiza, who is now married with three children, graduated from Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2001 with a degree in computer science.

Back then, she took a PTPTN loan and spent about 15 years to repay the loan through monthly deductions. The loan was completely settled by this year.

Her husband and a sibling were also beneficiaries of PTPTN loans.

Born in Kuala Terengganu, Nor Elaiza is the eldest in the family. She has two brothers and three sisters. Both her parents are now

retirees. Her father used to be a manager while her mother was a teacher.

"Taking up loans is easy but students must be aware on the importance to repay their debts on time. This is to avoid problems such as restriction on going abroad or to seek other loans," she said.

Thus, she urged PTPTN borrowers to be mindful and to have proper planning in making their repayment.

Another PTPTN recipient, who only wanted to be identified as Ryhan, took up a diploma course in interior design at UiTM and degree studies in creative multimedia at Multimedia University.

Ryhan, 37, also has a master's in

computer animation from the Wanganui School of Design in New Zealand.

The mother of four has settled the RM10,000 loan which she took in 1997.

There is still a balance of RM40,000 (1998 till 2003) which she is still paying off through monthly deductions.

"I have been repaying my loan since 2009 through monthly salary deduction," she said.

Born in Kuala Lumpur, both her parents had worked in the civil service. Her father was a customs officer while her mother was a clerk.

If there had been no PTPTN loan, she said her parents might have to resort to seeking bank loans to finance her studies.

The recent Government announcement that there would be a 10% discount for repayment through salary deductions or scheduled direct debit might benefit her, she said.

The second child among four siblings, Ryhan acknowledged that PTPTN loans helped a lot but cautioned students that they must have a repayment strategy.

Perhaps there should also be more study loan options available for students, she added.