

BN MANIFESTO

BEST EDUCATION PROMISES

Malaysia's education success has made it a point of reference in planning, progress and accomplishments achieved.

APRIL 7 saw the launch of Barisan Nasional's manifesto for the upcoming 14th General Election (GE14).

I would describe the manifesto, themed "Bersama BN, Hebatkan Negaraku" (Together with BN, Make Our Country Great), as among the best ever since it touches on all the important aspects of the people in this country through the 14 core and 364 initiatives outlined.

I am intrigued by the aspect of higher education and believe this manifesto is able to further strengthen the education ecosystem. This includes providing high-speed Internet at each public university to empower them in facing the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), introducing discount cards for students, creating the Al-Quran and P. Ramlee universities, providing assistance to the children of BRIM recipients studying in universities, and many more.

When it comes to higher education, the BN government believes that long-term planning is key to the rakyat's wellbeing.

For instance, in 2007 we introduced the Malaysian Research Universities (MRU) initiative which focused on the enculturation of research that could benefit society.

Alhamdulillah, now, almost 10 years after the initiative was launched, we have seen our public universities soar on the world stage, among them: Universiti Malaya (UM) is now ranked 114th in the world, a rise of 53 positions since 2013. This means UM has overtaken other world-renowned universities such as Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Georgetown University

(previously attended by US president Bill Clinton), Cardiff University, Vanderbilt University and Kyushu University. UM's engineering faculty has also been ranked 10th best in the world by the US World News and World Report Best Global Universities 2018. I am positive that UM will be entering the world's top 100 soon.

This 10-year achievement is further strengthened with five of the eight best universities in Asean, hailing from Malaysia. Also, according to the QS World University Rankings by subject, 10 courses offered by our public and private universities are among top 50 in the world. The other research universities, namely Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) are all within the top one per cent in the world.

Equally important, research findings by our universities have brought benefits to the people. For instance, researchers from UTM and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) have built a seawater desalination plant using membrane technology which now supplies free clean water to residents in Bachok, Kelantan.

In addition, UPM has introduced a hybrid paddy breed that is more delicious and more resilient than normal paddy, using drones to monitor, fertilise and track. In Sabah, Universiti Malaysia Sabah has collaborated with fish experts from Japan to breed high quality fish that can also be bred by locals.

The past five years were nothing short of an accomplishment and I am proud to be part of this.



Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh visiting a UPM padi research site at Kampung Lubuk Kawah, Jertih. Research findings by universities have benefited the people. FILE PIC

Our achievements were recognised by international bodies such as the World Bank when their global lead in higher education, Francisco Marmolejo, mentioned in his Twitter account that Malaysia's higher education system is a "global innovative case to follow".

In January, Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Mary Yap was invited to London to share her experience at the 2018 World Education Forum. She was part of a distinguished panel consisting of the former Australian prime minister, Finland education minister and also the head of Technology and Innovation from the World Bank. Malaysia's success has inspired many countries so much so that I've been invited to speak in Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Latvia and Turkey.

Alhamdulillah, all of these countries have recognised Malaysia as a point of reference in terms of planning, progress and accomplishments.

I am convinced that BN has the long-term vision to take this nation's higher education system to the next level. We do not make empty and populist promises just to win over the people.

The BN government's success in higher education is proven to be in line with the previous general election manifesto where it had achieved 99.4 per cent of its promises.

Many are unaware that the BN government subsidises public education by 85 per cent to 95 per cent yearly. For example, an UM medical undergraduate only pays RM15,300 throughout the five-year programme, compared with the actual amount of more than RM500,000.

The BN government has also never arbitrarily increased tuition fees; for instance, the fees for an engineering programme in UM is the same as it was 22 years ago.

Despite all that, the BN government is constantly striving to reduce the financial burden of

students. It introduced Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (PTPTN) in 1997 with the aim of ensuring that no student is left behind in education because of financial problems.

Every year, PTPTN has provided more than 200,000 loans to students with investments of over RM5 billion. This brings the total number of students benefitting from PTPTN to 2.8 million, with a total allocation of RM50.93 billion.

PTPTN has also granted payout exemptions to nearly 46,000 students who obtained first-class honours degree.

For other students, PTPTN provides flexibility in paying back their loans, including offering discounts, repayment extension up to 12 months upon graduation and loan consolidation to those who further their studies.

In other words, the Malaysian higher education system has proven to be the only system that is virtually free. The opposition wants to abolish PTPTN and provide free education, but have been unable to do it in Selangor for over 10 years while in power there.

In the West, the countries that provide free education have very high income tax rates — up to 55 per cent per annum. In Malaysia, the highest tax rate is about 28 per cent, with a 95 per cent subsidy for public education.

Does this mean the opposition will raise the tax rate if it wrests federal powers? Frankly, I would say, their manifesto is not feasible.

I hope Malaysians can see with their own eyes that the BN government has been successful in developing our education system. I wish that BN will continue to be given the mandate to bring the country's higher education system to greater heights.

The writer is minister of higher education



DATUK SERI IDRIS JUSOH

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