

# SULUNG SPARKS SUCCESS

Noraini: New MoHE initiative to help B40 children rise out of poverty

SCHOOL-LEAVERS Intan Nasuha Md Noh, Nurul Aishah Mohd Dani and Kaviarusu Linggam had no idea that they were about to have their tertiary studies fully funded by the Higher Education Ministry (MoHE) when they were recently accepted into the highly competitive medical, chemical engineering and electronic engineering courses at three of the country's public universities.

Imagine their elation last month when they received the good news that they were among the first cohort of the Keluarga Malaysia First Child Student Development Programme (SULUNG).

The new programme is aimed at giving youths in the B40 community a better chance at pursuing a higher education.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad said the programme aims to provide an opportunity for the first generation in B40 households – who have yet to see a family member pursue a bachelor's degree or higher qualification – to continue their tertiary studies.

"This programme is especially for B40 students who excel but lack the ability to enter higher education institutions (HEIs)," she said during the SULUNG launch and presentation of the ministry's sponsorship letters at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) on Oct 26.

She said SULUNG is a structured development programme designed to grow the potential of selected B40 students to become catalysts for individual and community development.

"This programme is also in line with the 12th Malaysia Plan's focus on eradicating extreme poverty and bridging the country's income gap," she added.

Noraini said she first mooted SULUNG in January, with the idea of benchmarking it against other similar programmes such as the "First in Family" in the United Kingdom and Australia, and the "First-Generation College Student" in the United States.

What makes SULUNG unique, she added, is that successful students are not only given entry into public universities, but they are also offered financial assistance in the form of bursaries covering tuition and various other fees, allowances and laptop assistance.

The students would also be given hostel accommodation, and counselling by a SULUNG counsellor and an academic adviser if they face any problems in their tertiary journeys. This is to ensure that they can focus on their studies.

"We will also help improve the marketability of these graduates by cooperating with industry so that they will gain access to better job opportunities upon graduation," she added.

Graduates of the programme would also be allowed to further their studies and become academics at the universities under the ministry.

This special entry pathway is expected to see B40 candidates taking up 10 per cent of the spots in public universities, polytechnics, community colleges and Public Skills Training Institutes (ILKA).

The first cohort, comprising 76 students out of 115,477 applicants, began their studies this month.

Noraini said SULUNG is being piloted at eight public universities, namely, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSII), Universiti



**Helping hand:** Noraini (ninth from left) together with Higher Education Ministry officials and some of the SULUNG recipients.



**On top of things:** Noraini speaking at the SULUNG launch and presentation of the ministry's sponsorship letters at UTHM.

Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) and Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP).

Next year, she said, the programme will be expanded to include the country's 20 public universities.

"The ministry is also working on obtaining allocations from the government and also funding from outside parties to ensure the sustainability of this programme," she added.

Noraini also welcomed government-linked universities and private higher education institutions (IPTS) to join hands with the ministry in conducting the programme.

"The implementation of this programme is based on interest and we hope to extend it not only to all public universities, but also all HEIs nationwide," she said.

## SULUNG selection

Students cannot apply for the programme. Instead, SULUNG recipients are identified based on a set criteria when they submit their UPUOnline applications.

Excellent students with a CGPA of 3.50 and above must select a competitive course at one of the eight pilot public universities as their first choice.

And they must meet the course criteria set by the chosen varsity.

For now, competitive courses include those in the fields of medicine, dentistry, engineering, law, accounting and business, and Teaching English As A Second Language (TESL) education.

The varsities will also conduct interviews and conduct checks on the students' homes and backgrounds to ensure that they are truly deserving of the aid.

According to the latest statistics, 1,416 students have been identified for the programme through UPUOnline.

Noraini said the success of SULUNG hinges on the ability of these students to have good careers and lift their families out of poverty.

"It is hoped that the SULUNG students will be independent after graduation and break the cycle of poverty. We also hope that their success will motivate their other family members and also the local community to strive for success," she said.

## Aid for all

During the event, Noraini also presented scholarships and sponsorships by the ministry to deserving students.

Noraini said the government had allocated RM150mil this year to sponsor the education of 30,314 Malaysians.

"The ministry also provides scholarships and financial assistance to target groups that include teaching staff in public institutions and qualified members of the public to further their studies from the certificate level right up to advanced degrees," she said.

The financial aid was for the Bumiputra Academic Training Scheme (SLAB), the IPTA Academic Training Scheme (SLAI),

## SULUNG

- > Gives B40 students a chance to rise out of poverty through higher education
- > These students are the first in their families to enter higher education institutions
- > All financial aid given by the Higher Education Ministry does not need to be reimbursed
- > The ministry will work with industry to provide job opportunities for students upon graduation
- > How to qualify:
  - Students cannot apply for the programme
  - Selection is based on their UPUOnline applications
  - CGPA of 3.50 and above
  - Come from B40 families with household incomes of less than RM4,850
  - Applied for highly competitive courses at the pilot universities

- > Students are provided with:
  - Financial assistance in the form of bursaries
  - Hostel accommodation
  - Counselling and academic advice
  - Access to academic and character development, professional, leadership and entrepreneurial programmes
- > Pilot universities for the 2022 first cohort: UKM, UPM, UTM, UPSI, UMS, USIM, UMP and UniMAP

Source: Higher Education Ministry *TheStar*graphics

the Sub-Specialty, Post Doctorate and Federal Training Prize (HLP) for teaching staff at public universities, polytechnics and community colleges, and non-academic officers at public universities.

For the public, financial assistance was for MyBrain Science (MyBrainSc), the IPT Outstanding Athlete Scholarship, Tokoh Siswa and the Polytechnic Outstanding Student Scholarship.

Besides SULUNG, the underprivileged community benefited from the Basic Financial Aid and Community College Student Financial Aid (BKPKK) and the recently launched B40 TVET Scholarship Programme.

The ministry also awarded the Financial Assistance for Persons with Disabilities (BKOKU) and the Special Education Programme (PPK) for persons with disabilities (OKU).

In addition, a zakat fund contribution of RM12mil was given to all 20 public universities through the Lembaga Tabung Haji's (LTH) Iqra' TH programme.

"This programme is part of LTH's corporate social responsibility which aims to help poor and asnaf students at universities cover their study costs.

"God willing, Iqra' TH will ben-

efit more than 30,000 students," said Noraini.

## Digital access

A total of 50 students from Negri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor were also presented with mobile tablets under the second phase of the PerantiSiswa Keluarga Malaysia initiative.

Noraini said more than 60% of the PerantiSiswa applicants were successful under the second phase of the initiative when applications closed on Sept 30.

About 291,000 applications were approved out of the 474,311 received, she said.

"The ministry expects the distribution of these devices to be completed within two months. This will be done in stages according to the zones.

"We have already begun distributing the devices in several public HEIs such as UMS, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniZA) (Besut Campus), International Islamic University (UIA), UKM, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and UTM," she added.