

# Better access, gains for OKU

## Free higher education will also be given to hardcore poor

**PUTRAJAYA:** More poor students of all races will be given free higher education, while persons with disabilities (OKU) will also be exempted from paying tuition fees.

Students from families classified as hardcore poor under the e-Kasih database would automatically receive free education with the support of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN).

“Previously, 5,800 students were covered. This has been increased to 10,000; therefore, we will ensure all 10,000 receive this support,” said Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abd Kadir.

He was speaking after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim launched the National Education Plan 2026-2035 yesterday.

Zambry said the plan also places emphasis on access to higher education for persons with disabilities (OKU).

He said while OKU students would continue to be assessed like other applicants, appropriate support would be provided.

“This time, it is not only about universities providing learning facilities for OKU students. OKU students who get offers to study at public universities, polytechnics or community colleges will be exempt from paying tuition fees,” he said.

He explained that the cost of the exemption would be borne by the institutions themselves.

“If a university has 20 or 30



**Exchanging views:** Zambry (left) chatting with the overseas students from Asia Pacific University Technology and Innovation after his speech at the Dewan Perdana PICC in Putrajaya. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

OKU students, their tuition fees will be waived.

“Other costs may apply, but tuition fees will be exempted,” he said.

He also said the government was aware that accommodation was one of the key challenges faced by students in universities and polytechnics.

Previous policies did not require universities to provide full residential facilities, but the growing number of students has made the issue more urgent.

“We are now working to help resolve accommodation issues due to the expansion of universities and the increase in student

numbers,” he said.

As part of the solution, he said government-linked investment companies (GLICs) would work with university holding companies to propose and develop student housing projects.

On the inclusion of Form Six and matriculation programmes into the higher education ecosystem, Zambri said the government would complete the required legal amendments this year.

He also said there would be an increase in student intake in several high-demand courses, including law, accounting, finance and banking, Islamic finance, artificial intelligence, economics,

Bahasa Melayu, English, communication, media studies, data science, data analytics and computer science.

“An additional 1,500 places will be added,” he said.

Unlike previous years, he said, the additional places would not be limited to research universities (RU).

“This time, the additional placements will also be in universities that are not categorised as RU. All public universities will benefit,” he said.

Responding to questions on whether students with the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) can use their certificate to enter public universities, Zambry said the move to make Bahasa Melayu and History compulsory for all students is not limited to those with UEC alone.

“It also involves international schools, Arab schools, religious schools and other educational systems that are not based on the national education system.

“The criteria that must be fulfilled are that Bahasa Melayu and History must be taught,” he said.

He added that any further decisions would require coordination between the Education Ministry and the Higher Education Ministry.

“You cannot solve the problem of just one community while the issues of other communities remain unaddressed.

“We will talk (with the Education Ministry). From there, we will get the next perspective,” he said.