

'SMART SKILLS'

FREE STUDY PLAN FOR POOR STUDENTS

Higher Education Ministry may introduce sponsorship programme for first-generation students at varsities

PUTRAJAYA

THE Higher Education Ministry hopes to introduce a free studies sponsorship programme for first-generation students from poor families at institutions of higher learning, said Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin yesterday.

He said the matter would be tabled to the cabinet for approval.

"It is a measure to end poverty through knowledge and skills," he said at the ministry's New Year mandate event here.

Khaled said the ministry also planned to give the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) new life by studying the suitability of turning it into a national trust fund.

"We want to reduce PTPTN's debt burden to ensure its sustainability and make it a national education financing institution that allows people from inside and outside the country to contribute to the funding of

the country's higher education."

He said the ministry was exploring combining face-to-face and virtual elements to take advantage of digital platforms and technology as this could reduce the cost of education.

Regarding the selection of leadership at institutions of higher learning and agencies under the ministry, he said it would go through a strict and objective screening process.

"The country needs an efficient and excellent higher-education sector.

"This must start with a credible and high-performing leadership," he said.

He called on the ministry's staff to educate students to meet academic standards and intellectual culture.

The ministry, he said, no longer focused on soft and practical skills, but on the need to be equipped with artificial intelligence for managing people and technology.

"Maturity in controlling emotions, multilingual skills, nego-



Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin meeting ministry staff after its New Year mandate event in Putrajaya yesterday. PIC BY MOHD FAQLI HAMZAH

tiation skills, the ability to lead discussions and work effectively in a team. It's all smart skills," he said.

He said the ministry would

overhaul the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programme to strengthen the system to produce more skilled and technologically com-

petent students.

"The country needs many people who have skills and technological competence that are future-proof." **Bernama**