<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Scholarship anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MediaTitle</td>
<td>Sunday Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>08 Apr 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Star Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page No</td>
<td>1to3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Full Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation</td>
<td>320,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readership</td>
<td>1,072,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArticleSize</td>
<td>2285 cm²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AdValue</td>
<td>RM 106,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR Value</td>
<td>RM 318,012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The saga of the nation’s

Scholarship anxiety

Stakeholders are keen to know how the much desired PSD scholarships will be awarded this year. >2 & 3

Let’s Hear it
Allow students to think and reason ->4

Competition
A mighty challenge ->6

Live and learn
Parents and students are anxious about the conflicting information in the print and social media about the status of PSD scholarships.

Soon after the SPM results were announced on March 21, many parents and students were already scrambling to find out more about the much sought after PSD (Public Service Department) scholarships. Many of them had called the department also known by its Malay acronym JPA (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam) and even visited its website for updates, only to be told to wait for the notice, which is expected to be released on the website on April 9 (tomorrow).

Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin is also expected to come up with an official statement regarding the matter.

Student Lyn Lee who called the department’s hotline last week was told by a staff to expect an announcement soon. Other students who called were also told the same and many of them then resorted to monitoring the PSD website.

Much of the anxiety is due to conflicting information regarding the awarding of the scholarships in the print media and on social media websites.

Last June, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced that the Government would review the PSD scholarship scheme and reward students who achieved excellent results in their pre-university courses instead of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

Najib added that the new policy would be as fair and balanced as possible in its allocation of PSD scholarships.

Over the last two weeks, parents and students have been waiting...
for some clear answers and some have expressed their concerns on social media.

“I have told my daughter that if she scores good results (in SPM), she can get a scholarship from the Government to pursue her studies locally or overseas. She took my word for it. I was wrong,” said a parent in a blog.

However, an educationist laments that PSD scholarships have created a situation where it is deemed the birth right of top scorers, which is an unhealthy culture.

“After all, with more straight A scorers every year it would be an impossible task to reward everyone with a scholarship to study abroad.”

**Limited resources**

In 2011, the Government spent RM1.44bil to sponsor SPM 2010 students to pursue their tertiary education. Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said RM1.08bil was used for overseas degree scholarships (PILN) and RM0.36bil for local degree scholarships (PIDN).

When the 2010 SPM results turned out to be the best in four years, Najib quickly responded and announced that those with 8A+ and above would receive PSD scholarships because the government wanted to reward high achieving students.

The preceding year, students who scored 9A+ or more received PSD scholarships regardless of their race. This was to show that 1Malaysia was not just a slogan, said the Prime Minister.

However, many students felt let down as they realised that not everyone would be sent overseas.

The rumblings of discontent continued among those who failed to secure overseas scholarships but were instead awarded scholarships to study in local institutions of higher learning.

Those vying for overseas scholarships felt they were denied their right to “quality” education. Nazri said in his reply in the Dewan Rakyat last June said that among the factors why many high achieving students were unable to secure overseas scholarships was because there were a larger and growing number of high achievers. The Government also had limited resources, he said.

**Retaining talents**

When the PSD scholarship scheme was set up, former PSD head Tan Sri Alwi Jantan (who headed the department from 1987 to 1990) said the objective was simply to create a pool of highly talented and educated people to serve the nation.

In the past the scholarships have been distributed in four categories. They are academic achievement (20%), racial composition (60%), bumiputra allocation in Sabah and Sarawak (10%) and socially-disadvantaged (10%).

More than 50,000 students have since benefited from the scholarship scheme (see tables).

Questions have also been raised if the PSD scholars on overseas scholarships returned to the country. Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Liew Vui Keong said in the Dewan Rakyat that 236 PSD scholars failed to return to the country upon completion of their studies between 2003 and 2007.

There appears to be some headway since the Government announced several initiatives last August. They include the Talent Acceleration in Public Service (TAPS) and Scholarship Talent Attraction and Retention (STAR) which are led by the PSD in collaboration with the Razak School of Government (RSOG) and Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad (TalentCorp).

This would help the Government to ensure that the best and brightest PSD scholars are drafted into the civil service to play a key role in the nation’s transformation programme, thus minimising a brain drain faced by the country.

There is a strong call from cer­tain quarters of the society for the Government to restrict the number of students in specific and strategic areas abroad in good uni­versities.

Prof Hassan believes the local institutions are capable of training the talents for our country, unless there are specific areas that the Government has identified as being crucial to attaining the Economic Transformation Programme and high-income status that justifies the sending of undergraduate students overseas.

“It would be a win-win situation because it will cut down the Government’s expenses, retain the talents, and spur the local institutions to strive for excellence,” he says.

“The Government should invest in sending scholars abroad at well­known universities at postgradu­ate level for areas that our country may not have the expertise,” he adds.

If international exposure is necessary to enrich the scholars’ learning experience, Prof Hassan said the Government could consider allowing students to study partly in Malaysia and continuing the rest of their studies abroad.

When debating if the scholar­ships should be given to those who excel in SPM or in pre-university studies, the focus should be on harnessing the talents in line with the country’s developments.

“It is all about talent manage­ment. We have to identify, capture and train them from young and maximise their potentials,” says Universiti Putra Malaysia vice­chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Radin Umar Radin Sohadi.

While he believes the local insti­tutions are just as capable of pro­ducing quality graduates, Prof Radin Umar says the Government should not stop sponsoring students to study abroad.

“We should send an appropriate number of students in specific and strategic areas abroad in good uni­versities to encourage diversity, networking and benchmark­ing against the best practices which are crucial to the country’s develop­ments,” he says.

See Part Two on the other scholar­ships available for students and also tips on searching for organisations that offer study awards next week.
Mixed views from students

SINCE the release of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results, there has been much discussion over the PSD scholarships and those who will be eligible to apply.

When asked if they would apply for the scholarship, many post-SPM students have said that: “PSD scholarships are only awarded to straight A students”, “there are no PSD overseas scholarships anymore” and “PSD scholarships won’t be given to SPM students anymore”.

In spite of the confusion, many parents and post-SPM students are clear about one thing – they hope the scholarships will still be offered to those who sat for the SPM last year.

“Many corporate scholarships are open only for Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) or A-Levels graduates and a majority are for engineering courses. I want to pursue medicine in the United Kingdom,” said Nur Nadhirah Jasni who scored 4A’s and 1A- in the SPM.

Although they are not sure about the criteria for scholars’ selection, some students believe that the scholarships will still be offered to those wanting to go overseas, there are SPM leavers who have put their tertiary education on hold while waiting for the PSD scholarship applications to open.

June Lee Pui Yin, who was supposed to have begun her A Levels in March, deferred it to July so that she could apply for more scholarships. “I didn’t want to rush into A Levels and then quit after my first semester,” she said.

The 18-year-old hopes to pursue a degree in Chiropractic.

“...help Malaysians who suffer from bone and spinal problems,” she explained.

“I hope the government will see the need for qualified chiropractors to cater for the ageing population and offer scholarships for this course,” she added.

Kyle Chan Wei Ren, who scored 1A’s in the SPM, didn’t wait. He began his A levels course even though he too intends to apply for the PSD scholarship.

While he has nothing to worry about in terms of merit, he is unsure about the criteria for the scholarship.

“My friends say the Government may only award scholarships for straight A students this year; everything is hazy right now,” he said.

All some of the students know is that applications for the PSD scholarships are expected to be open tomorrow.

This was communicated to Muhammad Fazlan at the Jom Masuk U Carnival at the Putra World Trade Centre.

“My brother said that I need 8A’s to apply for the scholarship and I only have 5A’s, but I’m going to try anyway,” he said.

Lee Seng Chor, whose daughter will be applying for the scholarship, said that selection should be based on merit as “otherwise the main driving factor for some students to excel would be absent”.

Source: The Hansard, 2008
The anxious wait for SPM results has now been replaced by anxiety on whether students can obtain scholarships. – File photo

Students jumping for joy after receiving their SPM results at SMK Sultan Ismail, Johor Baru recently.
Scholarship anxiety

Najib shaking hands with a PSD scholar after sealing a deal between PSD and Talent Corporation Malaysia Bhd. – File photo

A student looking at his SPM result slip. The scholarships search begins soon after one attains the SPM results. – File photo
SMK Maxwell students celebrating with school principal Radiah Nordin after receiving their SPM results recently.