

## COVER STORY

# Wish list for the Education Minister

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**W**ITH the change of the government from Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan after the recent 14th General Election, the nation saw the formation of a new cabinet lineup.

Dr Maszlee Malik was appointed as Malaysia's Minister of Education after Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad vacated the post just one day after taking it.

And the Education Ministry and Higher Education Ministry have merged into one. Maszlee joined Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia on March 12 this year and was elected as Simpang Renggam Member of Parliament after he won his seat in the general election.

A former lecturer at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Maszlee has written a book on Islamic governance published by Routledge. He pursued a major in Islamic Studies in Jordan and University of Malaya, and has a doctoral degree in Public Policy Studies from the University of Durham, England.

The 44-year-old was an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at IIUM and is adviser to civil society groups such as Ikram, IDEAS Autism Centre and Down's Syndrome Educational Centre.

Johar Baru-born Maszlee has been reported as saying that he would like better education for the less fortunate and equal opportunities for everyone.

In his quest to improve the education system since his appointment, he said more efforts would be put into introducing additional languages in national schools to increase the number of students with multi-language skills and lightened the burden of school teachers.

Maszlee said he is inspired to build a loving environment for teachers and students where there is respect for each other, regardless of race and faith.

"The culture of respect for one another is not being discussed in the learning process. We want the education institution to instill good values, making it a way of life within five years," he said in an interview with a local news agency.

The Education Development Plans 2013-2025 and 2015-2025 (Higher Education) will be continued as the proposals can improve the country's international standing in education.

Higher Ed spoke to educationists and students to get their views on improving the education system.

## RECLAIMING THE GLORY

Educationists hope that policies will be put in place for national schools to reclaim their glory days and be the first choice of parents of all races.

Taylor's University deputy vice-chancellor and chief academic officer Professor Dr Pradeep Nair expressed his support for the minister's aspiration for a more holistic and less exam-centric education system.



**...Reimagine education at all levels to produce Malaysians who are excellent academically as well as possess strong life skills and emotional well-being.**

**PRADEEP NAIR**  
Taylor's University  
deputy vice-chancellor  
and chief academic officer



The Education Ministry should look in-depth into research and innovation.

"I hope he will lead us to reimagine education at all levels to produce Malaysians who are excellent academically as well as possess strong life skills and emotional well-being," said Pradeep.

University of Nottingham Malaysia School of Education head Professor Ganakumaran Subramaniam said the country needs an education system that is visionary and forward-looking that enables learners to acquire and manage subject matter knowledge critically and creatively.

To achieve this, the education philosophy and curriculum need to be reviewed to integrate knowledge, skills and competencies through carefully selected core thematic areas delivered through innovative learning pedagogies.

"Curriculum content needs to be streamlined while assessment methods should be a combination of performance and academic measures."

"The teacher education curriculum needs to be overhauled in line with national education policies and practices," added Ganakumaran.

Professor Datuk Dr Rokiah Omar from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) said the education system should focus on instilling good values as schoolchildren now have less respect for their teachers and peers compared to 20 years ago.

"Encourage children to voice their opinions by engaging in public speaking in class. This builds confidence as well as the ability to speak up," added Rokiah.

## EDUCATION HUB

A total of 136,293 international students from



Malaysia aspires to be an education hub for international students.

more than 150 nations are enrolled at higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

This is a significant increase compared to 81,000 international students in 2013. This figure highlights the country's potential to become the world's education hub in 20 years' time if the positive momentum in the higher education system is maintained.

Professor Dr Mohamad Suffian Mohamad Annuar, a Professor in Biotechnology at University of Malaya, said if the country aspires to become a tertiary education hub, a strong research and innovation culture is imperative at public universities which require strong investment in terms of funding, human resources and top-notch infrastructure.

"Positive cascading effects such as attracting excellent prospective international students, external funding, improved industrial relations and active collaboration will ensue if world-class R&I is achieved," added Mohamad Suffian.

Dr Ismail Fitri Mohammad Rashedi, a senior lecturer at the Food Technology Department, Universiti Putra Malaysia, said the ministry should tap into the talent of experts in universities by bridging the gap between lecturers and the industry. Many high impact research have not been commercialised.

"Some industries, especially the small medium enterprises, are still using traditional methods due to lack of exposure to research by the university. For example, in food processing, lecturers can improve current methods and optimise profits by introducing their research to the sector," he said.

Pradeep hoped for the removal of unnecessary regulatory requirements that have restricted the growth of private higher education and created an unequal playing field for the providers.

"With a level playing field and an increase in financial incentives from the government, private higher education providers can become an even more powerful engine for human capital development," he added.

## ON THE WORLD STAGE

Universiti Malaysia Pahang deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs and alumni) Professor

Datuk Dr Yuserrrie Zainuddin said the university's student development policy requires a holistic approach in tandem with the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

For example, he added, a robust policy should promote student activities with access to faster broadband connection.

"The policy should provide additional provisioning requirements either through takaful assistance, increase the amount of student loans given by the National Higher Education Fund Corporation and offer more attractive tax relief," added Yuserrrie.

Lecturer Puteri Sofia Amiruddin from Taylor's University Law Faculty said teachers should be given more incentive and opportunities to attend conferences on teaching and learning so that they will be exposed to innovation.

Postgraduate student Aaron Denison hoped that the National Education Blueprint 2015-2025 would be reviewed so that the field of arts, social science and humanities would be given the same recognition as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

"There is also a need to increase the employability rate among students from this field," said Denison, who is pursuing the International Masters in Regional Integration programme at the Asia-Europe Institute in UM.

UKM media communication undergraduate Mohammed Faizal Mohd Nor Al Kamaruddin, who held the same views as Denison, lamented the lack of scholarships for courses in arts and social sciences.

Taylor's University Business School student James Chai wished for measures to reshape the country's education system to be globally competitive.

"It is promising that the Education Minister has embraced diversity and good practices from other countries."

He has stressed the importance of being multilingual in today's globalised world," added Chai, who is president of Taylor's AIESEC, an

international non-governmental not-for-profit organisation for young people.

Mohammed Faizal said the minister should emphasise English proficiency and its use especially at the tertiary level as well as make bilingual education mandatory at university without compromising Bahasa Malaysia as the main language for certain courses.

"Our education needs to be in line with global education to produce students who can compete on the world stage," he added.

Universiti Malaysia Pahang Students Representative Council leader Muhammad Amirun Aniq Mohamed Saidi hopes the 1Malaysia Student Discount Card will be maintained to ease the financial burden of students.

"However, the value should be increased because RM250 is insufficient to accommodate student expenditure, especially on books."

"The proposed abolishment of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 should be replaced with a more flexible act to create a more conducive learning environment on campus."

"Student leadership bodies also need to be supported so that the welfare of students can be improved," said Muhammad Amirun.

## THE DISABLED

Julia Lee Ai Cheng, a Cognitive and Science programme senior lecturer at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, hoped that tertiary education will be more inclusive where buildings and learning spaces in universities are accessible to individuals with physical and learning disabilities.

"Enact and enforce laws to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities such as the Education Act (1996) and the Education (Special Education) Regulations (2013)," said Lee.

Rokiah, who is a low vision specialist, hoped that special need students get better job opportunities. The ministry should also look into the disabled-friendly environment in schools.

"Engagement is low as we still segregate normal students from those with disabilities in different classrooms. Offer equal opportunities to those with physical and learning disabilities."



Yuserrrie Zainuddin



James Chai



Mohamad Suffian Mohamad Annuar



Aaron Denison



Puteri Sofia Amiruddin



**PROFESSOR DR AHMAD RAFI MOHAMED ESHAQ**  
Multimedia University president and chief executive officer



**"We look forward to strategies to stimulate research and development. These will give opportunities for researchers to innovate for our country's development."**

**PROFESSOR DR HAIRUL AZHAR ABDUL RASHID**  
Multimedia University Research and Innovation vice-president



**PROFESSOR GANAKUMARAN SUBRAMANIAM**  
University of Nottingham Malaysia School of Education head

**"We need an education system that allows students to think creatively and critically, and not be treated like sponges where they memorise and regurgitate information onto a piece of paper in an examination. Rather, we need an improved system to assess students on their understanding of a subject."**

**"Teachers' rights should always be protected and their welfare looked into."**

**SENIOR LECTURER DR ISMAIL FITRY MOHAMMAD RASHEDI**  
Universiti Putra Malaysia Food Technology Department

## Hopes for the future of learning

**"This is an exciting time for higher education in Malaysia. Monash Malaysia looks forward to working with Dr Maszlee Malik to support students in new ways. We want to ensure that our graduates can be active participants in the country's new programme of social and economic reform."**

**PROFESSOR ANDREW WALKER**  
Monash Malaysia president and pro vice-chancellor

**"Getting our students Industry 4.0 ready as well as equipping them with 21st century skills have been a challenge. I am hopeful that we can tap into educational technologies and innovations including Augmented and Virtual Reality to engage all strata of students in a fun way."**

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ARKENDU SEN**  
Monash Malaysia's Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences

**"As a university that champions ICT and multimedia fields, MMU hopes that the Education Minister will focus on the development of these domains to accelerate the nation's development in the Fourth Industrial Revolution."**

**PROFESSOR DR AHMAD RAFI MOHAMED ESHAQ**  
Multimedia University president and chief executive officer