

Special Address

by

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2022 Malaysian Education and Learning Summit

“Revitalising Education Today to Fill the Employment Needs of Tomorrow”

31st March 2022 | Seri Pacific Hotel Kuala Lumpur

- **YBhg Tan Sri Michael Yeoh**, President, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific
- **YBhg Dato’ Jessie Tang**, Director, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific
- **YBhg Datuk Parmjit Singh**, President, Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (MAPCU)
- **Assoc. Prof. Elajsolan Mohan**, President, National Association of Private Education Institutions
- [Check salutations]

Excellencies, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh. A very good afternoon.

- I would first like to thank Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, Dato’ Jessie Tang, and the KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific for this kind invitation and allowing me to address delegates of the 2022 Malaysian Education and Learning Summit. It gives me great pleasure to be here with a room full of educators and individuals passionate for the pursuit of knowledge and the development of our young people.

- The theme of this year's summit, Revitalising Education Today to Full the Employment Needs of Tomorrow, aptly captures the broad goals of the Ministry of Education to prepare our young, not only work the working world, but also life as a whole.

Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,

- We are living in exciting times. In the past two years, the pandemic has taken a huge toll on the progress of education, disturbing regular semesters as well as delaying the commencement of studies for many. To this day it is uncertain if we are truly in the clear, whether further disruptions are expected as it depends on the rate of mutations in the virus, leading to the various variants we see and whether the vaccines and their subsequent boosters will hold up to scrutiny. Such things are beyond our control.
- This had led to difficult decisions by the Ministry to take on learning online in the past two years. The Ministry has the safety of our young first and foremost in mind, which is why we undertook this decision to suspend physical classes on and off in the past few years. Inshallah.
- Yet at the same time, our teachers and students have admittedly struggled with the delivery of online learning, especially in areas with poor internet connectivity coverage. Even if the internet speeds are the best in the world, learning virtually has proven less effective than physical learning, in my humble opinion.
- As I'm sharing this space with fellow educators, I'm sure you are very familiar with the silence, despite having dozens of the students in the virtual classroom, very few if

not none at all turn on their cameras nor responding audibly. It is not too difficult to guess what happens behind the screens, where students are likely doing something else, merely signed on to the class virtually to mark their attendance, but are not signed onto the class mentally.

- As parents are at work and students essentially had 24-hour access to the internet and electronic devices that can be used for non-academic purposes, I'm sure you can figure out on your own why the Ministry is most keen on bringing our students back to the physical classroom where teachers can keep a watchful eye on the academic development of our students more effectively. The focus here is to ensure the delivery of quality education.
- Therefore, I'm pleased to report that after several months of uncertainty due to the resurgence of the number of COVID cases and with the number of cases stabilising in recent weeks, the Ministry has decided to fully reopen our schools to allow students to return to physical learning since March 21st of this month, slightly more than a week ago.
- For the first time, our Year One students, the batch of 2022/2023, have begun their schooling lives in March instead of the usual in January. Up to 3 million primary school students have returned to face-to-face learning.
- Our secondary school students will follow suit next week, on April 4, 2022. At the moment, they are still on a mix of virtual learning and rotations, depending on the school and age groups. However, I'm pleased to report that by next week they will all be returning to face-to-face learning without the need for rotations.

- Interestingly, it seems that the anxiety is not on the students, but parents, some of whom remain hesitant to send their children to school. As a parent myself, I understand this dilemma. However, I can assure you that our schools and teachers are well prepared in keeping our children as safe as possible by taking the necessary steps and SOPs to ensure cleanliness and providing a practical learning environment that minimises the spread of virus.
- In our joint effort between educators, students, and parents to keep our children safe, I urge parents who have yet to get their children vaccinated to do so as soon as possible.
- **As at 28 March 2022, vaccination rates for the 5-12 year-olds have reached 40.28%¹.** Although students will be allowed back to school premises regardless of whether or not they are vaccinated, we hope that the parents of the unvaccinated will take their children for the necessary doses as soon as possible as it is their sons and daughters whose safety could be compromised, and no child should need to be learning in fear. Should they not be vaccinated, there will be hesitation to sending them physically to school and that, in turn, will cause them to be left behind in their studies and developing meaningful friendships.

Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,

- Coming back to the theme of this Summit, certainly, one of the main objectives of education is to prepare our young – and even the old, for the workforce.

¹ Laporan Vaksinasi, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 28 Mac 2022

- However, even before COVID turned our lives upside down, the world has been undergoing rapid changes that have been brought about by the rapid pace of technological advancements. This has had implications on the global labour market.
- In response, Malaysian education providers have attempted to be up to date with industry requirements in terms of skillsets and expertise. Otherwise, we could risk missing out due to the digital divide.
- A study by Randstad, a global recruitment company, found that Malaysian industries are facing hiring challenges due to a mismatch in qualified talent against growing digital ambitions². This is happening despite the workforce being educated as candidates lack specific expertise to bridge the necessary skill gaps.
- This is perhaps evidence of our need to step up our reskilling programmes and for educators, presenting us the urgent need to consider the appropriate and relevant teaching syllabus more carefully.
- Interestingly, the study also found an undersupply of high-skilled jobs, causing people to take on jobs they are overqualified for. While we always emphasised that being highly qualified would bring greater salaries, we seem to have overlooked the availability of certain jobs to match the qualification of these graduates.
- Malaysia aspires to become a centre for investment, whereby we hope to attract the world's top multinational companies, convincing them to set up operations here. As

² <https://www.randstad.com.my/hr-trends/workforce-trends/malaysia-labour-market-lacks-skilled-talent-despite-skills-relevancy/>

the captains of various industries are present here in this Summit, I urge them to create and develop job functions that are suitable for our highly-trained graduates. Otherwise, these graduates will inevitably find work in other countries, contributing to the brain drain.

- I would welcome feedback on what is needed in Malaysian education to create an attractive business environment. This is an area I believe more transparency, frankness, and honesty is needed between the government and the various industries to develop an appropriate education policy.
- We have always emphasised the importance of education – of how businesses need to work together with educators to devise relevant and up-to-date syllabi. I hope this continues to be the case and implore businesses not only to see to their immediate needs but also the bigger picture in the time to come. Apart from the readiness of head-knowledge, there is also a need to consider the non-human aspects of preparedness.
- The setting up of effective internship, apprenticeship, or mentorship programmes needs to be made a top priority to provide the upcoming workforce pragmatic work experience, but also to show them the know-how to enable them to build upon a business's achievements.

Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,

- While much attention is focused on head knowledge, what is almost completely overlooked by educators is the lack of soft skills. The amount of learning and interactions that have predominantly been taking place virtually the past couple of years, despite some of its advantages, can also be problematic as we could see more graduates lacking the

soft skills that are necessary in the workplace, soft skills that are normally attained through extracurricular means. These are skills that develop outside the classroom, yet alone a virtual one.

- This risk putting skills that we have taken for granted, such as effective communication, negotiation, organisation and planning, people management, and most important of all – leadership, which could all be lacking in the future among future graduates.
- For this reason, I would like, once again, to implore those who are still refusing vaccines and disallowing their children to return to physical education to think about the consequences of your actions and think about the bigger picture as your children could be left behind if they are not allowed to return to physical education. Virtual learning, for all its advantages, cannot provide soft skill development.
- Educators too must see the importance of these co-curricular activities, rather than treating it as a mere requirement by the Ministry for each student, and allow students to pursue these interests naturally, wholeheartedly and genuinely.
- It is for these reasons that the Ministry has allowed the continuation of sports and co-curricular programmes, face-to-face, since the 21st of March.
- It is hoped that schools will once again become not only a place for book knowledge, but a place for all forms of learning – one's that come from play, causes, interests, and fellowship.

Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,

AS YOU ALL KNOW, THE PRIME MINISTER STRONGLY URGES THE MEMBERS OF THE CABINET TO USE BAHASA MALAYSIA IN PUBLIC EVENTS. AS SUCH, IT IS AN HONOR FOR ME AS THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF MALAYSIA TO OBSERVE SUCH A CALL.

Hadirin yang dihormati sekalian

- Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia sentiasa mencari, mengkaji dan menilai kaedah dan tatacara terbaik untuk menambahbaik suasana belajar bagi menjamin aras dan kualiti pendidikan yang tinggi.
- **Dalam usaha berterusan ini, melalui program pengambilan guru secara "one-off", sehingga 28 Mac 2022, KPM telah menempatkan seramai 13,255 guru di seluruh negara manakala baki 515 lagi akan ditempatkan mulai 11 April 2022 untuk menangani isu kekurangan guru di sekolah.**
- KPM juga akan menyediakan almari khas di sekolah-sekolah rendah rendah khususnya yang menjalani dua sesi untuk membantu menangani isu beg sekolah yang berat di kalangan murid-murid.
- Kadar dan nilai nutrisi makanan yang dijual di kantin-kantin sekolah juga sedang dan akan terus ditambahbaik.
- Apa yang saya sebutkan tadi hanyalah sebahagian kecil daripada usaha-usaha yang dilaksanakan oleh KPM bagi memastikan para pelajar diberi peluang yang terbaik dan secukupnya untuk berjaya dalam pelajaran mereka. Kita berharap dengan usaha-usaha ini mereka akan menjadi

modal insan yang bukan sahaja dapat menyumbang semula kepada negara tetapi juga cemerlang di pentas dunia.

- Adalah menjadi harapan saya untuk terus melihat rakyat Malaysia berjaya di merata dunia dan kita boleh berbangga kerana kita tahu bahawa bahawa sistem pendidikan Malaysia inilah yang telah membolehkan ini semua berlaku.
- Before I conclude my speech, I would like to emphasise that filling the employment needs of tomorrow first requires us to revitalise our approach to education. Recognising its importance alone is not enough. Greater effort is required by all – educators, businesses, parents, even friends and family, who all need to play a part in educating our young. We must not see it as a chore, a ranking, a certificate, or a form of rubber stamp that is required for our young to make money, but as a necessary and enjoyable part of one's life journey in this continuous road of learning to become a better person.
- With that, I thank KSI once again for giving me this opportunity to address you today and look forward to the deliberations made at today's summit. I wish you all a fruitful and productive discussion.

Thank you.