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Education Ministry apologises for SPM woes, accepts responsibility

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Education Ministry today apologised for the numerous problems students have encountered in the on-going Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination, and will take full responsibility for what has happened.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Education Ministry, Datuk Mahadzir Khir, made the apology in the House, and again outside in the lobby when speaking to reporters.

Mahadzir said all necessary measures would be taken to ensure similar incidents would not recur.

The Ministry will also ensure that the leaking of examination questions would not happen.

Mahadzir was responding to criticism from students and their parents over snags in the administration of this year's Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination, which included insufficient question papers, missing pages and errors in some questions.

First, there was the revelation that there were insufficient copies of the History and English papers at nine examination centres. Then followed the incident of blank pages in a Mathematics paper which affected candidates in at least two schools.

There were also cases of students being 'quarantined' either because there were not enough papers or because the wrong papers were distributed.

"I would like to apologise on behalf of the ministry. The ministry will take full responsibility (for what happened)," said Mahadzir.

"We are only human and bound to make mistakes although we realise that such incidents kept cropping up this year."

He said the Ministry was not going to shirk its responsibility and a thorough investigation was underway to determine how the mistakes could have happened.

On blank pages in some of the papers, Mahadzir said the ministry was liaising with the printers to determine how it could have happened.

"In any case, once the printing is done, the questions are packed in envelopes and distributed to the centres. Only 10 minutes before the exam will the envelopes be opened. These are security measures. We are looking into these too."

Mahadzir declined to say whether the question papers were printed in the country or overseas.

He said the Ministry was concerned as this was the first time mistakes of such proportions had occurred in the examination.

Mahathir also said the Ministry would take remedial action if claims that some of the questions were flawed were found to be true.

"But we will have to establish this first before a decision can be made," he said.

Several parents had complained to the media and the Ministry that there were mistakes in the Physics and Additional Mathematics questions.

Citing examples of other problems, Mahadzir said that on Nov 14 students of Sekolah Menengah Shah Alam and Sekolah Menengah Megah, Shah Alam could not start their examination because of a shortage of English question papers.

Mahadzir said the examination could only start about 30 minutes later when extra copies were secured from other centres.

Then on Nov 16, pupils at 15 centres in Perak and 27 in Pahang found

themselves staring at blank pages for the Mathematics 1 paper.

Earlier, in response to a question by Husam Musa (Pas-Kubang Kerian), Mahadzir said the annual collection of fees for the examination conducted by the Malaysian Examination Board was RM91.21 million.

"However, the management cost is RM115.3 million. The Ministry has no plans to abolish examination fees as it has to pay for the management and administration costs.

"The examination board will not decrease the examination fees as it cannot afford to," he said when Husam pointed out that the glitches in the SPM examination papers raised serious questions about the efficiency of the board.

To this, Mahadzir said every measure would be taken to ensure that the incidents did not happen again.

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