

Education issue will determine Maszlee's attitude on Budget 2021

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INTERVIEW | Education is an issue dear to the heart of former education minister Maszlee Malik and thus the Perikatan Nasional's education policy will determine how he will vote on the Budget 2021 at the Dewan Rakyat.

The Simpang Renggam MP, who recently quit Pejuang and is currently focusing on the education and welfare of the people from his constituency, described that this would be his way in politics.

"For me, politics is to ensure the best education for the people and to give what is the best for the people in Simpang Renggam. This is my focus," he said in an interview with Malaysiakini at Education Rejuvenation Organisation in Cyberjaya.

"Others may resort to politicking for certain positions and for parties," he said, when asked if education issues will determine his support for the budget which

was tabled last Friday at the Dewan Rakyat.

To Maszlee, it is more important to raise the question of the direction of the national education policy which he claimed remained unclear.

"We are just guessing about it. The answers were given in Parliament but they meant nothing at all.

"As such, we (have to) offer a solution. People said (we) criticise only, why not coming up with proposals. Here's our suggestion, get us into the policy committee and we can discuss together," he said.

He expressed concern on educators, students and parents coping in a difficult situation and where they have to deal with eleventh-hour decisions of the ministries.

He cited a last-minute decision on the recent schools' closure and the postponement last month of the registration and orientation process for new public university students which resulted in students being stranded at their campuses.

Maszlee appeared to be not in favour of the across-the-board decision to close all

schools at the very last minute as there were schools not affected by the surge in Covid-19 cases.

In this case, he said the parent-teacher associations must be engaged prior to a decision being made and the decision should not be made just within the Education Ministry and the Higher Education Ministry.

Moreover, these sort of decisions had made things difficult for many others, particularly those who do not have the access to the Internet, he said, adding the ministry should consider an effective alternative to address the problem.

"We have mistreated the children and even the teachers. The schools and the parents know better of the situation," he said.

"If the area is safe and the teachers feel safe, with the consent of the parents then the school can be opened and operated partially and in rotation with observation to the stricter SOPs," he said.

"[...] this is so that the children will not be left out as interaction between the teachers and the children is the most important part in the learning process," he said.

Those with experience in education, such as former ministers and deputy ministers, should also be engaged by the Education Ministry, he added.

Maszlee also said the issues involving online learning were not limited to devices and Internet access alone but also the quality of the learning content be it at the school or tertiary level.

As such, he said an appropriate allocation should be given for the development of quality content for the purpose of online learning and public universities could work with private or overseas universities to produce quality content.

"On the contrary, this is the opportunity for our universities - if possible - to work with these universities so that in the end, our students who follow some modules which were bought from the leading universities.

"They not only get a degree from a local university, if they pursue the courses (from foreign universities), they will get both," he said.

"We convert the challenges faced to an opportunity," he said.

"We look forward to a creative solution like that brought by the Higher Education Ministry, but not as creative as the one in TikTok," he said with a sardonic tone.

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