

**Education, economic equity main draw for Chinese community, says Saifuddin  
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By Mohd Farhan Darwis**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 — Education and economic equity are the main issues that will attract the Chinese community, who appear to have swung their support in favour of Pakatan Rakyat (PR), says Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah.

The Umno supreme council member speculated that it will be highly possible to win the Chinese votes back if those issues are resolved by the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

“To court Chinese voters, we have to really, deeply consider the issues that are most dear to them, like education.”

“Personally, I feel that we need to show a road map when we plan to recognise the certificates issued by 60 of the Chinese private schools,” Saifuddin (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in an interview recently.

“Maybe there will be some matters that need to be rectified, with respect to standards of quality, if we don’t recognise them now, we would still have to one day,” he said.

The Temerloh MP also agreed with the government’s step in recognising certificates issued by Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR) College which, according to him, is a “step forward towards the road map”.

“We need to show the road map, since the steps towards it are already there, like the recognition of TAR College,” he said.

He didn’t deny the possibility that issues like economic equity will be hard to tackle, but according to him, the government needs to convince the Chinese community that it is up to it.

“Other issues might seem difficult ... but we need to solve them, for example, we need to convince them on issues of equality, equal economic treatment, assisting the poor and so on, without regards of race ... if we succeed we can at least get the support of the Chinese.

“But the government has actually given a lot, there are only one or two things that need to be tackled since they are impossible to accomplish, even if PR governs there will be no assurance that they can tackle them,” he added.

However, he observed that the current BN government’s policies are problematic in their implementation, and made difficult by time constraints.

“Government policies are already lovely; it’s just that the implementation takes a little time, along with some weaknesses.

“But problems can be found anywhere, we just have to do that little bit more, and we need to convince them that we can give equality in economy to all races,” he explained.

Education is an important point for the Chinese community in Malaysia, as evident by pressure group Dong Zong (the United Chinese School Committees Association), which has demanded several changes in the national education policy in order to strengthen Chinese education in the nation.

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Dong Zong had last month submitted a memorandum on matters concerning Chinese education to the prime minister.

Minister in Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz later stated that the demands were reasonable, but this view was dismissed by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as "a personal one".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak revealed yesterday that the Cabinet was looking into implementing an eight-point plan to address the shortage of teachers for Chinese vernacular schools, drawn from roundtable meetings involving various stakeholders including Dong Zong.

Under the eight-point plan, the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and English at Level One in Chinese vernacular schools of Grade A and B will be carried out by teachers who are qualified to teach the Chinese language at least at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) level.

While for under-enrolled schools, the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and English at Levels One and Two will be carried out by teachers who have Chinese language qualifications at least at the SPM level.

The Education Ministry also came out with long-term initiatives to overcome the teacher shortage problem in Chinese vernacular schools. One such initiative was formulating the Add-on Option Intervention Programme (Program Intervensi Tambah Opsyen or PITO) for teachers who do not have a Bahasa Melayu or English option, and have taught a subject other than the Chinese language for over five years.

This course is expected to start by year end so as to not affect the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Apart from that, the number of Chinese studies lecturers will also be increased in teachers' training institutes across Malaysia.

This will be overseen by one of the two deputy education ministers.

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