

# Belanjawan 2023 helps elevate education to next level

A big chunk of the budget goes to BMP, as it is given to every child regardless of their parents' income

by AKMAR ANNUAR

WITH less than six months to go till the year is up, the Education Ministry (MoE), which received the largest allocation in the Belanjawan 2023, is aggressively working to ensure that it achieves the intended outcomes.

The Belanjawan tabled by Prime Minister (PM) Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim in the Dewan Rakyat on Feb 24 had set aside RM55.2 billion for MoE, up from to RM52.6 billion in 2022.

Another RM15.3 billion was allocated for the Higher Education Ministry (MoHE) versus RM14.5 billion in the previous year.

Most importantly, the education funds emphasise two key aspects which are restoring and developing national education through various measures outlined in Belanjawan 2023 to make Malaysian education competitive.

The measures include an extension of tax relief of up to RM3,000 for sending children to the Taska or Tadika pre-schools until the assessment year 2024 and RM10 stamp duty is extended to cover educational loan or scholarship agreements for employment for all levels in educational and training institutions completed from June 1, 2023.

A big chunk of the budget has gone to the Preschool Food Assistance or Bantuan Makanan Prasekolah (BMP), as it is given to every child regardless of their parents' income, Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek shared in a statement.

The rate of BMP had been raised from RM2 to RM3 for Peninsular Malaysia, while for Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan, it was increased to RM3.25 from RM2.25, to benefit over 215,000 preschoolers at a cost of RM108 million.

The budget for the Supplementary Food Programme or Rancangan Makanan Tambahan (RMT) under MoE has increased from RM625 million to RM777 million. For Peninsular Malaysia, the rate was increased to RM3.50 from RM2.50 and from RM3 to RM4 for Sabah and Sarawak, which benefits around 700,000 students.

Fadhlina shared that the ministry has increased its value per child, including preschoolers, to address multidimensional poverty, especially in terms of malnutrition.

A sizeable allocation was also channelled to repair dilapidated schools, to make all schools a safe space and environment.



Belanjawan 2023 highlights the rate of RMT under MoE has increased from RM625m to RM777m



Bernama pic



Mohamed Khaled says MoHE is pushing for closer cooperation between universities and industries so that all graduates are marketable

"We want these students to be safe as most of these buildings are between 15 and 20 years old," she added, sharing that RM920 million will be used to ensure that all projects are completed.

On top of that, all schools would receive RM20 million for school community collaborations (gotong-royong) as such activities help inculcate unity and teach students how to care for their communities.

The ministry allocated RM70,000 for toilet maintenance in school, to ensure their cleanliness within three months.

Going towards digitalisation,

schools and education institutions would receive 50,000 laptops announced under the budget by the end of the year.

On this, Fadhlina said her ministry is still in the procurement process because there are procedures to follow but assured the public that the ministry will deliver.

"Everything we do is questioned because of legacy issues. There is a trust deficit. Unlike before, we now have a very transparent procedure — no more hanky-panky. There will be tight scrutiny," she said.

National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) president Aminuddin Awang in a statement urged Fadhlina to lobby for a bigger allocation, to get more funding for infrastructure development, especially for digital education.

Universiti Malaya (UM) Education Faculty senior lecturer and teacher-trainer Assoc Prof Dr Zuwati Hasim also stressed the need for funds to maintain infrastructure, adding: "There are many old schools in both urban and rural areas that require immediate attention."

Fadhlina said the National Digital Education Policy has been approved by the Cabinet for immediate implementation to ensure digital fluency among teachers and students.

To ensure the success of the policy, MoE is now focusing on improving infrastructure



MoE is now focusing on improving infrastructure and streamlining the digital ecosystem in schools, says Fadhlina

Pics source: parlmen.gov.my

and streamlining the digital ecosystem in schools.

"We are working with the Communications and Digital Ministry (KKD) to improve the infrastructure and digital ecosystem in schools and for a start, some 3,600 schools have benefited from KKD's PoP (Point of Presence) project," she said after officiating the 2022 Digital Utilisation and Technology Awards (Duta) on July 11.

Adding to the digitisation initiatives, the education budget also included a RM35 million fund to improve internet connectivity in higher education and institutions under the Malaysian Research, Education Network programme (MYREN).

Fadhlina stressed that the ministry has set a high target to reduce the digital gap among all types of schools.

There are several initiatives from the Belanjawan 2023 that have been successful in helping the B40 target group as unemployment among those aged 15 to 30 has decreased.

A teacher and mother of two university students, Azizah Ismail said Belanjawan 2023 was an important step towards ensuring a sustainable future for coming generations.

"The postponement and discounts on the National Higher Education Fund Corp (PTPTN) repayments are also easing the burden on youths, including my children, as they build their own

futures and careers," she told The Malaysian Reserve (TMR).

Describing the initiatives as youth-friendly, Monash University Malaysia economics professor Niaz Asadullah agreed that these financial incentives, upskilling programmes and new provisions are protecting youths from the high cost of living, and promoting their marketability.

"Beyond improving access to education and salaried jobs, Belanjawan 2023 has also created better support for youths seeking self-employment, with the relevant initiatives including specialised entrepreneurship training for B40 youths and microloan schemes to assist young micro and small-time entrepreneurs to start or expand their businesses," he said in an interview with TMR.

Also in Belanjawan 2023, funds are channelled to the research and development (R&D) activities under MoHE and the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (Mosti) to create new resources, thus enhancing national competitiveness and to ensure sustainable development through a knowledge-based economy.

Education Minister Fadhlina stated previously that 180,680 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) students from the 2021 school session chose not to further their education.

MoHE Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said on top of upgrading and maintaining public university facilities, the ministry is introducing a flexible studying environment, shortening the course period and providing more industrial and work-based learning.

"This is to attract more youths to further their education at the tertiary level," he said in a statement.

Mohamed Khaled added that his ministry is aware that some of the concerns of the students not furthering their studies are due to the job market, unemployment, and having low salaries despite having a higher education.

These are being addressed, he said, and the ministry is pushing for closer cooperation between universities and industries so that all graduates are marketable.

Similarly, MoHE had introduced a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) foundation programme to allow those who enter the Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN) from a polytechnic after completing three years of courses to enrol straight into the second year.

Sharing Khaled's optimism, Fadhlina said the programmes offered by the vocational college have achieved impressive success, with the marketability of graduates rising to more than 90% at present.

"We need to convey this to the public so that they are aware of the opportunities offered in vocational colleges," she said.

Some of the other new initiatives include introducing a flexible study course where students can alternate between taking their courses on campus and virtually. Also, courses that take four years to complete will be shortened to three years.

The government will also coordinate with multinational companies (MNCs) to provide internship opportunities and students are allowed to serve their scholarship bonds with the companies (for local scholars studying abroad).

There are a lot more initiatives and measures from the government that Malaysians could explore.

Parents and youths are encouraged to find out how to leverage on these initiatives by visiting [belanjawan.mof.gov.my/manfaat](http://belanjawan.mof.gov.my/manfaat).