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Bukit Semuja assemblyman calls for greater education autonomy in Sarawak

KUCHING: Bukit Semuja assemblyman John Ilus has called for greater autonomy over education in Sarawak, expressing concern about the impact of politicisation on the country's education system.

Speaking during the State Legislative Assembly (DUN) sitting yesterday, he applauded the state government's initiatives to support students, such as assisting in the repayments of National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loans, providing the RM500 book vouchers, and distribution of free laptop computers.

He also welcomed the establishment of the Sarawak Sovereign Wealth Future Fund, aimed at generating state revenue and providing free education to Sarawakian children in the future. However, John expressed concern about the lack of progress in managing education on Sarawak's own terms.

He called upon the state government to find ways towards gaining autonomy over infrastructure and school buildings in the state, citing the Serian District Education Office as an example of an overcrowded and cramped facility.

"This office is cramped and overcrowded with staff, so it is recommended that the Sarawak's Ministry of Education and Talent Development take the initiative to gain autonomy over infrastructure and school buildings in the state," he said.

John also highlighted the need for new schools in Serian, such as SMK Serian No 2 and SK Sri Sadong.

"The construction of new schools in Serian, namely SMK Serian No 2 and SK Sri Sadong, is highly necessary but (it is) still a question mark," he added.

Additionally, John requested the relevant authorities to provide GiatMARA Serian with a modern, viable and safe facility to replace the current inadequate accommodation.

On another note, the assemblyman stated that the Serian Division still lacked a comprehensive sports complex with various facilities, noting that the only one it had was the Serian Mini Sports Complex, which only had a football field and a track.

"The track is already damaged, as was reported in the media recently. It would be good if funds from agencies could be used for this purpose; then, it would not be a problem for us to assist in considering these facilities. Recently, we submitted a request through the Sarawak Sport Corporation (SSC) to assist in shaping up and incorporating several other sports facilities for the consideration of relevant ministries and agencies," said John.

He added that the SSC should be given the responsibility to manage and oversee sports complexes not only in Serian, but also in other suitable locations, as well as develop them according to current demands and the preferences and directions of the state's sports.

"This is not to underestimate the capabilities of the local councils, but they already have many other commitments that require their focus," he said.