The year in education

REVIEW: A highlight of announcements, challenges and changes in the country’s education scene last year

EDUCATION BLUEPRINTS

Last year saw another milestone when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the National Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 to transform the country’s tertiary education landscape for the next 11 years. The blueprint aims to produce students who aspire to be “ethically and morally upright, spiritually grounded, compassionate and caring” and who “appreciate sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle.”

The Higher Education Ministry began developing the blueprint in 2013, drawing on multiple sources of input from Malaysian and international education experts, and also the public. More than 100 stakeholder groups and thousands of individuals were engaged in the process.

The blueprint addresses the need to move from a higher education system with a primary focus on university education as the sole route to success, to one where academic and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) pathways are equally valued and cultivated.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh said getting an education can no longer be a mere paper chase as it involves initiatives to develop holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced individuals who can forge forward despite the challenges of the time.

Education is the single most important sector that needs to be strengthened in the country now. The strengthening process is well on its way upwards with guidance from the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education).

Idris added: “Never before have we been so serious in putting things in order. The blueprints were developed through a collaborative process with input from various stakeholders in education. They are comprehensive and look into everyone’s welfare in the sector. They also build linkages between the school and higher education sector.”

“With these blueprints in place, our education system is assured of staying on track, notwithstanding future changes in leadership at the ministerial level. They will steer education in the country until 2025 with the goal of being at the top one-third of nations in the world for education.”

MINISTRY RESHUFFLE

On July 28 last year, the Education Ministry (under former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) was split into two, with a revived Higher Education Ministry in charge of tertiary education and headed by former Second Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh. Datuk Mary Yap Kain Ching was named Deputy Higher Education Minister.

The Higher Education Ministry has been charged with putting into place a higher education environment that encourages the growth of premier knowledge centres and individuals who are competent and have high moral values to meet national and international needs. Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khairuddin was appointed Education Minister. His Deputy Ministers are P. Kamalanathan and Chong Sin Woon.

SOARING UPWARDS

Following the launch of the Education Blueprints, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh introduced the catchphrase “Soaring Upwards” to make the transformation of the system a national priority. It also serves as an inspiration for the ministry and stakeholders to move forward.

While acknowledging the process will take time, assurance was given that things are improving, taking shape and soaring upwards.

The ministry also organised roadshows nationwide to give the public insight into the quality of education in the country, sharing success stories resulting from various initiatives over the last decade.

This aggressive awareness campaign also focused on achieving the 10 shifts mentioned in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Higher Education).

The 10 shifts address key performance issues in higher learning institutions, including a focus on outcomes for students in academic and TVET pathways, academic community and lifelong learning.

HAZE EFFECT ON SCHOOLS

While the start of the 2015 school year was postponed due to the floods, 4,778 schools in several states had to be closed because of the haze in October last year. The schools were ordered to close after the Air Pollutant Index reached unhealthy and even very unhealthy levels. Some 2.7 million students were affected by the closures.

Altogether there were four occasions when the Education Ministry had to order a shutdown of schools due to the haze last year.
SIUL PELA JARAN MALAYSIA
ENGLISH COMPELUSORY PASS
POSTPONED
In August last year, a statement
by the Malaysian Examination
Syndicate said it had postponed
the implementation of English as a
compulsory pass subject in the
SPM from this year. The decision
to put the proposal on hold was
to give teachers and students more
time to prepare.
Data from the Malaysian Examina-
tion Board showed an almost
consistent failure rate for SPM En-
lish since 2011. In 2011, 27.3 per cent
failed the subject, 22.9 per cent in
2012; 20 per cent in 2013 and 22.7
NEW UJAR PENCAPANAN SEKOLAH
RENDAH FORMAT
The enhancement of the UPSR for-
mat involving the English Language
paper was welcomed by the Malay-
sian Congress of Teachers Unions in
the Education Service.
Its president Datuk Mohamed
Sabri Mohd Arsal said the move
to grade comprehension and writ-
ing separately will be an effective
gauge of the pupils’ proficiency in
the subject.
“This is the best form of assess-
ment for the pupils after six years
of learning the English language in
school and will hopefully improve
their proficiency,” he added.
The new and improved 2016
UPSR format, which also involved
the Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese lan-
guage, Tamil language and Science
subjects, was revealed by the Malay-
sian Examinations Board.
The comprehension paper will
include more subjective and less
objective questions compared with the
previous format.
From this year, UPSR candidates
in SK schools will get six grades as
compared to the current five. Those
in national type (SJK) Chinese and
Tamil schools will get eight grades
instead of seven.
The new format is in line with
the implementation of the Standard
Curriculum for Primary Schools and
School-Based Assessment in addi-
tion to culturing the elements of
Higher Order Thinking Skills.

UNIVERSITY RANKINGS
University of Malaya (UM) has
improved five notches to rank 166th
in the annual Quacquarelli Symonds
(‘QS’) World University Rankings as
compared with 2014.
This is the second consecutive
year the national top public univer-
sity has improved in its performance.
It ranked 176th in 2013, and climbed
to 151st (2014) and 146th (2015).
Universiti Sains Malaysia has climbed
from 309th to 289th this year. It ranked
49th in Asia with an overall score of
43.4 points out 100 while Universiti Putra Malay-
sia recorded an encouraging
improvement as it climbed from 376th to
311st in 2015.
UM also ranked 29th in Asia, with an
overall score of 62.1 points. It achieved
its best score in the academic reputation
indicator through the faculty/student ratio,
which measures the proportion between
students and teaching staff, and also in the
international faculty indicator.
Taylor’s University was ranked in the
Top 201-250 in Asia (as announced by QS
Asia Rankings).

INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS
On the international front, Universi-
ty Teknologi MARA emerged the
champion in one of the world’s
most competitive debating tournaments,
the Cambridge International Debating
Competition.
Mohd Miftasz Mohd Murshid
Kieron and Jasmine Ho, both 22,
successfully defeated the
“House of the House who believes that the
International community should
pay countries near to conflict zones
to process, settle and restrict the
further movement of refugees”
in their position as opening govern-
ment.

BUDGET FOR EDUCATION MINISTRIES
In the government’s 2016 budget
for the Education Ministry, RM41.4
billion was allocated for improv-
ing the quality of education under the
Malaysian Education Blueprint
2013-2025.
In addition, RM13.4 billion was
allocated to the Higher Education
Ministry.
Among others, the government
will build 30 primary and 27 sec-
ondary schools.
A sum of RM44.6 million was
also allocated to implement vari-
ous programmes in 9,115 preschool
classes in schools nationwide.
To increase proficiency in Baha-
sa Malaysia and English, RM135
million was allocated for uphold-
ing the former and strengthening the
latter.

Given the importance of the
language to compete globally, two
initiatives, namely the Dual Language
Programme and Highly Immersive
Projects, may be implemented as
an option at a cost of RM38.5 million.
In this respect, 300 schools have been
identified as a pilot project.
To ease the burden of schooling
expenses, the RM100 school-
from children from households with
a monthly income of RM3,000 and
below. This will benefit 3.5 million
students through an allocation of
RM350 million.
The supplementary food pro-
gramme involving 550,000 students
from poor families listed in e-Kasih
will be enhanced. Previously, the
programme only provided meals
during recess, but it will now be
expanded to provide breakfast at
an additional cost of RM75 million.
The overall cost for the programme
is RM423 million.

As in previous years, the govern-
ment will continue to develop and
maintain education facilities at
schools which follow the national
curriculum, with an allocation of
RM350 million.
To strengthen higher education,
the scholarship programmes will be
continued with allocations as follows:
RM65 million through the Public
Service Department; RM288 mil-
lion through the Education
Ministry; RM350 million through Higher
Education Ministry; and RM289 mil-
lion through the Health Ministry.
To encourage the rakyat to pur-
se higher education, the maxi-
mum relief on tuition fees for an
individual taxpayer is increased to
RM7,000 from RM5,000 a year.
This will be complemented with the
continuation of the RM250
Malaysian Book Voucher Pro-
gramme for 1.2 million students.
To prevent misuse of the voucher,
the redemption will only be allowed at
designated bookshops.
A sum of RM6 million was allo-
cated to 545 TVET institutions,
bearing in mind that 60 per cent
of 1.8 million new jobs by 2020 will
be for workers with technical skills.
The International Islamic University
Malaysia won the English as a
Second Language category trophy at
the same tournament.
Two Malaysian teachers and four
16-year-olds joined the Students
On Ice (SOI) expedition from
July 27 to Aug 10 last year to devel-
op a deeper understanding of and
respect for the planet and to make a
difference in their communities and
around the world.
The programme was made possi-
ble by Yayasian Penyelidikan Antar-
tika Sultan Mizan through an under-
standing with SOI Foundation based
in Canada.

“We aim for graduates who are
job creators. Today, we are
dealing with issues of marketability
and employability. The education
transformation we are putting in
place is aimed at providing
solutions to these problems.”
Idris Jusoh,
Higher Education Minister