

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS BY PROF TEO KOK SENG OF UKM ON SARAWAK'S PROPOSED PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

A Professor from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia had in his statement in FMT News App on 26th September cautioned that the proposal by the Sarawak Government to set up International schools goes against the provisions of the Education Act 1996. He stated that this is so because all government schools must use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of Instruction.

1. I would like to state that Sarawak is a law abiding state and that we take extra care to make sure that every initiatives and programs that we undertake do not contravene the laws of Malaysia.

2. We have studied the relevant laws and have had extensive engagements with the Ministry of Education and have complied with the requirements of the Ministry in every step of the process of setting up these schools.

3. In coming to the decision to set up these schools, we have considered the following factors:

(a) the responsibility of the State to protect its rights as regards its education policies as stated in paragraph 17 of the Inter-Governmental Committee Report, 1962 (IGC Report) as follows;

*" ... although Education, item 13(a) of the Federal list in the Ninth Schedule will be a Federal subject, the present policy and system of administration of education in North Borneo and Sarawak should be undisturbed and remain under the control of the Government of the State **until that government otherwise agrees**. In particular :-*

(i) the present policy in the Borneo States regarding the use of English should continue;”

The State government has never departed from this policy.

- (b) section 15 of the Education Act 1996 [Act 550] do not include education in international schools. These schools to be set up are international schools and are to be owned and maintained by Sanjung Services Sdn. Bhd., a private company registered under the Companies Act 2006. Sanjung Services Sdn. Bhd. is a subsidiary of Yayasan Sarawak.

Thus, the statements by the Professor relating to the requirements under the Education Act 1996 do not apply to these schools.

4. To reiterate the above, the proposed Yayasan Sarawak International Secondary Schools are not government schools within the definition of the Act. They are private schools as they will be owned and operated by a company just like most of the other private international schools that are currently operating in Malaysia.

5. Further, our earth breaking ceremony for the first schools was done only after obtaining a letter of support from the Ministry of Education. In this letter of support, it is clearly stated that Sanjung Services Sdn Bhd. have fulfilled all the:

“syarat-syarat penubuhan sekolah antarabangsa yang di tetapkan KPM.”

6. For the information of the Professor, the objective of setting up these Private International Schools is not only to improve the command of

English. More important than that, it is to provide access for high potential students from low income families to quality international education.

7. The Professor must be aware that Private International schools are mushrooming in Malaysia. According to the latest Malaysian International School Market Intelligence Report by ISC Research, enrolment in Private International schools has grown by 61.2% from 60,400 in July 2013 to 97,300 in July 2019. As at January 2020, there were 280 English medium international schools with total enrolment of 100,060 students at both primary and secondary levels of which 70 % are Malaysians.

8. Looking at the above figures, there must be a reasons why more and more parents are sending their children to international schools. I believe that some of these parents may not be really wealthy, but because of their concern for the education of their children they made the sacrifices.

9. Unfortunately, due to the high cost, parents with limited income, especially those from rural areas cannot afford to send their children to these schools. As such, the rise of private international schools in Malaysia has created a scenario of unequal access to quality international education.

10. The objective of Yayasan Sarawak Private International schools is to provide children with high potential from low income families with quality international education and develop them as individuals that are well balanced, responsible, disciplined, and capable leaders. YAB Chief Minister wants to ensure that high potential students from underprivileged background are not denied of the opportunity to realize their full potential.

11. This is a strategic long term initiative to ensure that our future captains of industry and commerce as well as our social, political and civil

leaders will not only come from the urban elite, but also from those who have poor and rural background. This will not only help to reduce the gap between rural and urban Sarawakians but also create a more inclusive and equitable society.

12. I would like to inform the Professor that the setting up of private international schools is not the only initiative of the Sarawak government to enhance the quality of the education system in the State. Sarawak is investing millions of ringgit to complement and supplement the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the State Department of Education. These include:

- Upgrading or rebuilding of dilapidated schools
- Increase accessibility to treated water supply and 24 hours electricity supply
- Continuous Professional Development programs for School leaders and teachers
- Support students co-curricular and extra-curricular activities
- Provide teaching and learning resources and facilities
- Programs to nurture and develop interest in STEM

13. I thank the Professor for his suggestion that we import British teachers to improve the standard of English in our schools. We have actually considered this costly option but feel that, for the moment, it is better to invest that money to improve the competency of our own teachers and students. We have implemented many programs towards this, including:

- Teaching of Mathematics and Science in English
- Sarawak English Language Education Symposium (SELES)

- Post graduate Certificate in Teaching English as Second Language (budget has been approved by State Government but still awaiting approval from MOE)
- Supply of teaching and learning resources in English
- Sarawak English Language Proficiency Initiatives (SELPI)
- Speak English Every Day Every Where (SEED)

14. In conclusion, the current education scenario does not provide a level playing field for all Malaysians. Private International schools are already mushrooming and parents who can afford are sending their children to these schools that are giving their children a head start. What the Sarawak government is trying to do is to provide similar opportunity to students from low income families so that there will be greater inclusivity in the future.