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## 'Maintain even playing field for TVET'



SKILLS IN DEMAND

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TECHNICAL and vocational education and training (TVET) is part and parcel of the country's higher education landscape.

That's why polytechnics and community colleges need to be treated with the same regard as public and private universities.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said vocational colleges are "important pillars" in the development of good talents and manpower for nation-building.

"I have often emphasised that polytechnics and community colleges are not 'second chance' institutions. Instead, they move in tandem with the other higher learning institutions in our country," he said.

Speaking during the official handing over of Higher Education Ministry duties in Sepang on Dec 14, Mohamed Khaled highlighted the need to strengthen existing higher learning institutions – most notably those that offer TVET courses.

"We will ensure that the institutions are moving in the right direction through its leadership, mission and vision," he said, adding that the ministry is always open to input from other tertiary education stakeholders.

During the event, Mohamed Khaled also revealed that the government has no intentions to increase the number of public universities in the country.

"Twenty public universities are enough. These universities are categorised under research, comprehensive, and focused institutions that we hope will operate smoothly," he said.

Moving forward, the minister said efforts will go towards ensuring all higher education institutions are of the same standing and provide quality education.

He said the ministry hopes to

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Mohamed Khaled: Higher education institutions must go beyond academics to develop talents



**Strong foundations:** Mohamed Khaled highlighted the need to strengthen existing higher learning institutions. – IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/ The Star

reach a point where there is no distinction between the various higher learning institutions in the country.

"We want to ensure that our higher education sector can lead to better knowledge and innovation," he said, adding that producing quality graduates is crucial for nation-building.

Although there will not be any new public universities, Mohamed Khaled said the government won't curb the setting up of private universities.

Private universities, he said, can help to accommodate foreign stu-

dents as the country strives to become a preferred education hub.

"Public universities have a limit on the intake of international students. Here's where private universities can play their role," he explained.

At the same time, Mohamed Khaled assured that he would carry out good policies that were introduced by his predecessor Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad.

These included the Keluarga Malaysia First Child Student Development Programme (Sulung), aimed at giving youths in the B40 community a better chance at

pursuing higher education.

"A change in ministers does not mean a change in policies. We will continue whatever that is good for the higher education sector in the country," he said.

### Unlocking full potential

Mohamed Khaled's recent appointment to the unity cabinet marks the second time the man is serving as higher education minister.

The former Johor menteri besar previously held the portfolio for five years between 2008 and 2013.

Mohamed Khaled, who likened his return to the ministry as a homecoming of sorts, said he would focus on issues faced by tertiary students.

"We will look into marketability of graduates, education funding, as well as how to prepare them as the desired manpower in the 21st century," he said.

Above all, he stressed that the bigger purpose of higher education is to give opportunities to individuals to develop and better themselves.

"A country's success in higher education is a critical factor for national transformation. Higher education plays an important role as an agent of change for the nation," he said, adding that higher learning institutions need to hone talents and skills, instead of just producing graduates with good grades.

The Kota Tinggi Member of Parliament reiterated his call on

the importance of going beyond academics at a separate event on Dec 16, where he once again stressed the importance of vocational colleges.

"We cannot focus solely on academics; the country also needs technical fields and skills," he reportedly said after attending a Friday prayers event in his constituency.

Mohamed Khaled vowed that the ministry would pay serious attention to the role and contribution of vocational colleges, and how they can further attract students' interest to acquire new skills.

That sentiment to further propel TVET to new heights was shared by Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh.

In an interview shared on social media on Dec 10, Yeoh explained that her ministry will look into strengthening TVET programmes in the country.

"There's currently too much focus on academics in Malaysia. Those who are good at learning usually get all of the attention," she said.

However, Yeoh said, that doesn't mean that youths who are less academically inclined should be sidelined. Instead, efforts should go towards unearthing other talents that they may have.

"There may be some youths are good at doing business or at singing. There are so many talents out there and we need to provide youths with a platform to explore their interests," she said.