

KERATAN AKHBAR

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Priorities to be considered for revised Budget 2023

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DEPUTY Finance Minister I Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan has promised that improvements to Budget 2023, which will be tabled in Parliament on Friday, will include pledges made in the election manifesto of the political parties that make up the unity government.

Knowing that these parties made different pledges during the hustings, we would expect adjustments in some of the promises while others may be put on hold.

But if there was a common wish-list, I think most of us would want a bigger allocation for the Health Ministry.

Our public hospitals are facing acute overcrowding and shortage of doctors, specialists and new equipment, among others. All this requires more funding.

Budget 2023 must also provide more relief for people in the B40 and M40 categories who are reeling from the effects of the prevailing economic slowdown. They can be further assisted with stimulus packages and given easier access to licences with waivers from fees and administrative red tape.

Where the Education Ministry is concerned, there must be an overhaul in the emphasis of learning for students in secondary school and universities.

We know that the old ways and priorities will continue to give way to new technologies, including robotics and artificial intelligence.

It has been forecast that 30% of future jobs do not exist now, and therefore we must prepare our graduates and school leavers to be

employable for that time.

We are already facing a huge excess of unemployed graduates. A survey conducted in 2020 found that some 200,000 graduates were yet to get jobs.

Yes, our schools and universities must prepare our young for a very competitive future, and funds are needed for this.

A significant area of concern that has not received due recognition in recent years is national unity. In some ways, our communities are drifting apart and living in silos.

We must have active programmes to promote racial and religious unity and harmony as well as regional integration.

To get such programmes going, the ministries concerned, particularly the National Unity Ministry,

will need adequate allocation.

Our police and armed forces could also do with a greater injection of funds as they continue to carry increasingly heavy workloads to keep us safe.

One more department that needs a boost in funding is the Auditor General's Office, which has painstakingly exposed the wastage and leakage of funds and resources in ministries, government departments, agencies and authorities year in and year out.

This office must be accorded greater priority in the allocation of resources since it performs a crucial role in ensuring that public monies are well spent.

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