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SPM pupils to sit new English paper this year

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Candidates for this year's Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination will sit a new English paper which incorporates elements of the English paper conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate.

Announcing this today, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said with the introduction of the new paper, the English paper known as English 1119 offered by UCLES would no longer be available.

Previously, English 1119 - which is considered "a bit tougher" compared to the SPM English paper - was offered as an elective and separate paper and those who passed it were awarded with a certificate by Cambridge University.

It was usually taken by candidates planning to pursue their studies overseas.

"The new paper, to be jointly conducted by the ministry and UCLES, will be recognised as of the same level as English 1119.

"Candidates only have to pay an additional RM10 on top of the usual examination fees compared to RM98 when taking the Cambridge paper before this."

Najib said the move was made in line with the ministry's aims of enhancing the level of English in the education system to one recognised internationally.

Speaking to reporters after chairing a post-Cabinet meeting at the ministry, Najib said the students were ready as those in Form Four last year had already been taught the new aspects of the subject.

Those who perform well in the paper will be awarded with two certificates - the SPM certificate and another from UCLES.

"However, for those who failed to achieve the grade, the results will be entered into the SPM certificate only."

He announced that Standard Five pupils would for the first time sit the Science subject in the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah examination this year.

For SPM, another new elective subject - Engineering Technology - would be offered this year in the examination.

Thirty-five schools have started teaching the subject to Form Four pupils last year.

On delays in the completion of school projects and shortage of chairs and tables in schools, Najib said it was mainly caused by contractors and suppliers.

"The ministry is continuously finding ways to overcome such problems, which are not easy to solve."

However, he said it was unfair to criticise the ministry when the delay involved only a small number of schools.

"It is true that there are one or two new schools which have failed to open when the first term began this week.

"But there are many others which have met the deadline and these are not highlighted."

The ministry will release the total number of new schools affected by the delay in completion tomorrow.

About 800 pupils were stranded on the first day of school on Sunday when a RM2.9 million secondary school in Chalok, Setiu, was not completed on time.

The pupils, mostly from rural areas in the district, had been placed in two other schools nearby pending the completion of Sekolah Menengah Chalok, which was supposed to be have been completed by Dec 16.

Two other school projects in the State had also been delayed. They are Sekolah Menengah Jerangau and Sekolah Kebangsaan Lubuk Kawah, Jertih.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had yesterday ticked off contractors who failed to complete their projects on schedule, especially public facilities like schools.

Asked about reports that some schools had implemented the single-session school well ahead the target date set by the ministry, Najib said the ministry had never given its permission.

A meeting with the National Union of the Teaching Profession to discuss the matter has yielded positive results, the details of which will be announced later.

On concern raised by parents over the segregation practised by schools where intelligent pupils are separated from the slow learners, Najib said the situation had been misinterpreted.

What had been done was to group together students according to their performance and capability so that teaching could be carried out more effectively.

"Just imagine the difficulties face by teachers if they are to teach a class comprising highly intelligent students and those who can't even read."

The streaming process is reviewed yearly. The ministry has instructed schools not to neglect the weak pupils.

"The term segregation is wrong as it conveys the wrong meaning ... as if schools are only paying attention to the bright pupils while the rest are being neglected."

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