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One Saturday a month off day for schools, too

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - All schools will be directed not to carry out extra-curricular activities on the Saturday which will be declared a holiday each month, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today.

The directive, to be issued through circulars soon, will be effective from next year.

He said this was to enable students, their parents and teachers to indulge in rest and recreation.

"Such a move will also help boost local tourism," Najib said after his Ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.

Currently, schools carry out extra-curricular activities on Saturdays. This will require the students and teachers involved to be present.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when presenting the 1999 Budget, had declared one Saturday in a month a holiday for civil servants.

The Public Service Department will decide by the end of the year whether the Saturday would be at the beginning or end of the month.

On another matter, Najib urged local private institutions of higher learning to set up their own agencies abroad to promote their respective courses.

This, he said, was because the Ministry had received information that some agents operating abroad to promote educational opportunities in Malaysia were cheating those keen to study here.

"We have been told that there are such unscrupulous agents in Beijing. They charge each student between US\$2,000 (RM7,600) and US\$3,000 with false promises of places at private colleges in Malaysia," he said, adding that the agents were Chinese nationals.

Najib said such agents tarnished the image of the country and was a "slap in the face" in Malaysia's quest to be a centre of educational excellence.

"This is why local private colleges should set up their own recruiting agencies abroad. However, only those colleges authorised by the Ministry to recruit foreign students can set up the agencies." He said the Ministry would monitor the situation.

On the Chinese students who had been cheated, Najib said those without the proper qualifications would not be given places at the private colleges in question.

On his recent visit to Melbourne and Sydney, he said he met with Australian leaders and Malaysian students there.

"I briefed them on the political and economic developments in Malaysia and informed them that there was no cause for concern."

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