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Calls to give rural schools more attention

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MPs yesterday highlighted the disparity in standards of education between rural and urban areas during debate on the Supply Bill 1999.

They cited examples to back their argument and spoke on issues concerning facilities and the psyche of teachers.

Sukinam Domo (BN-Batang Sadong) said there was a need for both sympathy and empathy in addressing the issue.

She said teachers in rural schools were either "green" or old timers and lacked motivation.

"Can you stand teaching at the same rural school with three classes and 20 pupils for years?"

The performance of Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah candidates in Sarawak this year reflected the need for greater efforts, she said, citing the percentage of A passes in English which stood at 9.5 per cent; Mathematics (15.8 per cent); and Science (six per cent).

Chiew Chiu Sing (DAP-Bintulu) spoke of how teachers had to share quarters, which were also not satisfactory.

He asked how some rural schools could still be backward in a fast developing country.

Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) said the Government had been unfair to rural schools and alluded to the computer programme and Smart schools.

"We have asked how many of the 90 Smart schools are in rural areas. The Education Ministry said there are no statistics for that," Ruhanie said.

He spoke of the danger of the disparity between rural and urban schools widening and deepening.

On certain parents and teachers poisoning the minds of children as highlighted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Ruhanie said the matter had to be looked into seriously.

Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (BN-Batang Lupar) questioned the Education Ministry on its allocation to urban and rural schools.

"More funds are needed to help schools in rural areas in view of their lack of facilities," he said.

Expressing similar sentiments, M. Kulasegaran (DAP-Teluk Intan) said incentives should be given to woo more teachers to serve in rural areas.

On UPSR, he said it appeared that more than 50 per cent of pupils did not meet the mark.

Kulasegaran also called on the Ministry to give special attention to Tamil schools in rural areas in order to rectify weaknesses.

Datuk Abu Zahar Datuk Nika Ujang (BN-Kuala Pilah) said priority in the provision of computers should be given to rural schools.

He also spoke on the long-standing plan to build an Institut Teknologi Mara branch in Kuala Pilah.

MPs also spoke of the problems facing National (Chinese Type) primary schools.

Datuk Hon Choon Kim (BN-Seremban) said while these schools were attracting more pupils, their number has actually dropped.

Datuk Lim Si Cheng (BN-Senai) also alluded to overcrowding at these schools, saying that two in Johor Baru had an enrolment of more than 4,000 each.

Dr Tan Chong Keng (BN-Bukit Mertajam) said many parents wished to send their children to such schools so they could learn Chinese from an early age.

As for his constituency, he appealed to the Education Ministry to consider building such schools in Taman Kota Permai, Taman Sejahtera and Alma.

On Smart schools, he said in every parliamentary constituency, there should be at least one national school, one Chinese Type and one Tamil Type school designated as Smart schools.

Abdul Hadi Awang (Pas-Marang) said there were indications that the Government was gradually absolving itself from the responsibility of financing higher education.

As a result, there were students from poorer families who had been denied the opportunity to further their studies.

Datuk Dr Kamal Salleh (BN-Wangsa Maju) said corporatisation of universities should result in greater flexibility to the universities which should also be encouraged to generate funds.

Dr Tan Yee Kew (BN-Klang) called on the Education Ministry to address the shortage of classrooms in Chinese Type schools.

She urged the Ministry to seriously consider providing a piece of land for Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan (China) Peng Hua, which was now squatting on Heng Wah Secondary School's premises in her constituency.

She said the board for the Chinese primary school had submitted applications to the Ministry for assistance but had been unsuccessful so far.

"It is hoped that this problem can be resolved quickly," she added.

Lim Hock Seng (DAP-Bagan) called on the Government to build more Chinese primary schools.

"What is important is the need to enhance our educational facilities irrespective of whether the medium of instruction is Mandarin or Tamil," he added.