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Crusoe in Malaysian classrooms (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Robinson Crusoe, Potato People, The Prisoner of Zenda, The Phantom of the Opera and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde will be part of the literary diet for secondary students next year.

Poems like If by Rudyard Kipling, The Road Not Taken (Robert Frost), Sonnet 18 (William Shakespeare) and a translation of The Dead Crow (A. Samad Said) will be on that menu as well.

The list of Bahasa Malaysia and English works that secondary school students have to read to inculcate the reading habit, was released by Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today.

The programme would be implemented in Form One and Four in March next year, in Forms Two and Five in 2001 and in Form Three the following year.

The books will comprise novels, short stories and poems.

Among Bahasa Malaysia novels that will be compulsory are Julia by Abu Hassan Morad, Di Hadapan Pulau (A. Samad Said), Merdeka! Merdeka! (A. Rahman Hanafiah), Timulak Kapal Perang (Azmah Nordin) and Aku Anak Timur (Siti Aminah Yusuf).

Some Malay dramas listed are Noordin Hassan's Jangan Bunuh Rama-rama, Serunai Malam (Usman Awang) and Jalan Sempit (Amelia Hashim).

Among short stories listed by the Education Ministry for English classes are Somerset Maugham's The Lotus Eater, The Pencil (Ali Majod), Of Bunga Telur and Bally Shoes (Che Husna Azhari).

Najib said his Ministry was planning to evaluate students on their reading at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia level in the year 2001 and at the Penilaian Menengah Rendah level the following year.

He was speaking at a Press conference after his Ministry's weekly post-Cabinet meeting.

Najib was also asked about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that Bumiputera students were capable of achieving good results similar to other races but had not lived up to expectations because they were easily distracted and did not concentrate on their studies.

Najib said although the students had achieved much, they had the potential to do better if they concentrated fully on acquiring knowledge.

He said the Prime Minister hoped that Bumiputera students would fully utilise the educational facilities the Government had prepared for them.

"This is so they could acquire a high level of general knowledge to show that they are capable of improving themselves. We want them to be internationally competitive," Najib said, adding that Bumiputera students should not just be average students.

He said both teachers and parents had a big role in placing emphasis on education as a way of life so as to bring about a change in the students' attitude to studies.

Asked if a special commission was needed to address the issue, he said it was not necessary but his Ministry welcomed suggestions.

On a report today that 464 mission schools in the country may cease to exist as State Governments were rejecting renewals of land leases and imposing exorbitant quit rents, Najib said he would meet school officials soon to hear their problems.

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