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New school block a dream come true for former HM

BANTING, Mon. - A dream will come true for the former principal of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Methodist, Teluk Datok, near here on Saturday when a new block at the school is opened.

The landmark occasion, to be officiated by Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, will see the realisation of I. Selladurai's 12-year drive to raise funds for the project.

He has prominent businessman Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal Abu Bakar, of the class of 1963, to thank for the successful venture.

Najib will open the four-storey block and a multi-purpose hall for the 1,700 students at the school. The block, to complement two other blocks, can accommodate 12 classrooms, two science laboratories and a surau.

Selladurai said plans for the new block that replaces the school's old Merdeka block built in 1957 were laid down when he became the headmaster in 1986.

"I presented the plans to Mustapha Kamal and he was very interested in helping," he told reporters today.

He said Mustapha Kamal, who is Emkay Group of Companies executive chairman, despatched the company's engineers and surveyors to the school within a week.

Fund raising then began for the RM2 million project with the school organising activities such as a jogathon and a charity dinner.

Selladurai said Mustapha Kamal agreed to match fund raising efforts ringgit for ringgit, a challenge which spurred massive efforts from teachers and students.

"We also managed to raise a substantial amount from parents and former pupils," he said.

However, technical problems delayed the project and it only took off last year.

"By that time we had collected almost half of the money needed," Selladurai said, adding that Mustapha Kamal agreed to top up the remainder for the project to proceed.

"He has been the biggest driving force in our quest to get the building up, and we are very grateful for that. It was a great gesture from our former student," he said.

Selladurai said the classrooms are named after several of his schoolmates and family members as the corporate leader wanted to remember the people he was with during his schooldays.

"The surau will be named after his mother, Hasni," he said.

Selladurai said the block will be the third building in the school to be officiated by a Minister. Former Education Minister Abdul Rahman Talib opened the original building in 1962 with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (who was then Deputy Prime Minister) opening another block in 1976.

Despite Mustapha Kamal and Selladurai's efforts, the school still needs money for the project besides furnishing the classrooms.

Headmistress Alice George, who took over from Selladurai in April last year, said the school had asked for a RM500,000 grant from the Education Ministry.

She said the contractor, also an old boy, had agreed to be flexible on payments and was willing to wait for the school to raise funds.

"But the project has been an amazing success in terms of co-operation

between the school, parents, and former pupils.

"It is more than just a building as it also represents the spirit and sacrifice of the people involved," she said.

George, who will be leaving the school to become headmistress of Convent Bukit Nanas in Kuala Lumpur on Aug 17, hopes former pupils will continue to help the school financially.

"That is why we are inviting as many old pupils as possible for the opening of the new block," she said.

Former students interested in attending the ceremony can contact George at 03-8761532 or 03-7762593.

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