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Plan carefully to prepare students for the digital era

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WE are moving into a digital economy. The country should prepare itself towards this era where emphasis should be given to science and mathematics.

Subjects that would help students in this area should be encouraged.

The use of English language, too, should be encouraged because it is an "International" and international language.

Effort to encourage more students to take up science and mathematics is meaningless if there is no change in the basic structure of the curriculum.

For example, there should be a change in the composition of the timetable in relation to the allocation of learning and teaching periods.

At the secondary school level, the science elective subjects have been reduced and the syllabus has widened making the grasp of the subjects superficial.

I think this move is not sound and counter-productive.

When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there should be change in the curriculum to prepare our children for the digital era, we thought there would be an appropriate response to his call. But, when they came out with the need to learn Kesusasteraan Melayu (Malay Literature) we are baffled.

The principal is the most important person in a school. The soul and energy of the school is influenced by the principal.

However, with the introduction of the time-based and guru-pakar schemes, the school principal is now earning less than those under his supervision. He is relegated and humiliated. He is demoralised because he has lost the respect of his people.

This has led to a situation where nobody wants to be school heads and senior assistants.

In case readers are not fully informed, the best Bumiputera students are selected and sent to about 40 fully-residential science schools.

There are more than 20,000 of these students nationwide.

These fully-residential science schools are being managed by a small administrative unit comprising fewer than five junior ministry officials.

In contrast, in smaller States like Perlis, Malacca and Penang, where there are fewer schools, the schools are being managed by the entire State Education Department, with a battery of support staff complete with directors and section heads.

Although they are called fully-residential science schools, they are just like any ordinary school; in fact they do very well in non-science subjects.

At the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia level, their performance in science subjects and additional mathematics is below the average of some of the well-known day schools.

For readers' information, "gerontocracy" is currently acceptable in the Education Ministry. Thus we see people promoted to State Education Directors a few months before their retirement. I personally doubt the wisdom of this practice.

I think we should prepare students for the digitally-based future. To properly do this, I'm of the opinion that directors should have a longer "shelf-life" to make them more accountable to the Ministry.

All in all, I think the Ministry should have more integrity and act more

wisely to gain respect from the public.

Integrity here means putting the country first before popularity. There should be infusion of competent and correct people in the Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's circle of advisers.