

16/09/1999

Students good in science don't want to be teachers

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysians who excel in science and mathematics are not interested in becoming teachers.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today they preferred to be engineers, doctors or accountants.

"We want to produce more teachers specialising in science and mathematics to help enhance the performance, especially of Bumiputera students, in these subjects, but those who excel in these fields do not want to be teachers," he told reporters after his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.

Najib was responding to a proposal brought up at the Fourth Bumiputera Economic Congress recently where former director-general of Education Tan Sri Dr Wan Zahid Mohd Noordin had urged the Government to increase the number of teachers specialising in science and mathematics.

Wan Zahid said this would help enhance the performance of Bumiputera students.

He said Bumiputera students lagged behind the others in these subjects not because they were "slow" but because they were not exposed to an environment which promoted an interest in studies.

The performance of students in science and mathematics had also been raised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Chinese school students performed better in these subjects, he said, causing an increasing number of Malay parents to send their children to such schools.

Najib said the Government was continually making efforts to increase the pool of teachers in science and mathematics, "but we have this problem".

"So we have to look at other means of ensuring sufficiency in teaching manpower for the two subjects, for instance, redeployment and extending the contracts of teachers.

"We are confident, however, that Smart Schools will expose students to information technology and ultimately, a better grasp of these two subjects."

Meanwhile, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said Chinese schools were becoming increasingly popular among parents, irrespective of race.

This was because such schools gave students an opportunity to pick up three languages, adopted lively teaching methods in science and mathematics, and placed much importance on information technology.

He said the underlying rationale behind the move was that parents felt it would put them in a "win-win situation".

"They feel it will give their children an opportunity to learn three languages as besides Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mandarin is widely used."

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