

15/02/2001

Seeking initiatives to improve English, IT

ameo) 2001" by Chok Suat Ling

KOTA KINABALU, Wed. - The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Council today resolved to seek initiatives to improve the standard of English and knowledge of information technology among students.

Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, in a Press conference at the end of the 36th Seameo Conference at the Pacific Sutera Hotel, said the council noted the importance of the English language and information technology in the new era of globalisation.

On English, Musa, who is also Seameo president, said, however that each country in the region has different concerns.

"In Indochina, their concern is to provide basic education in English to their students. This is because theirs is an education system based on French.

"In Singapore, English is their first spoken language.

"Malaysia's concern is different. We want to strengthen our command of English as a second language. We want to achieve a higher level of usage and improve the rudiments of the language to what it was when it was the first language."

Musa said Southeast Asian countries would, however, be working together to resolve the problem.

"We will be developing a package of materials under the Seameo Regional Language Centre based in Singapore to provide training in the teaching of English to be delivered by distance learning.

"The centre will be our focal point in efforts to boost the command of English."

The standard of English among Malaysian schoolchildren has been said to be declining. Educationists have made various proposals to arrest the decline including introducing more subjects in English.

The three-day conference was attended by delegates from Seameo's 10 member countries. It was launched on Monday by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Seameo is an intergovernmental organisation established in 1965 to promote cooperation in education, science and culture in the region. Its member countries are Malaysia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

It has six associate member countries - Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands and New Zealand, and one affiliate member, the International Council for Open Learning and Distance Education.

Seameo has 15 regional centres in Southeast Asia to provide regional leadership in human resource development, education, health, agriculture and environment.

Musa was unanimously elected Seameo president during the conference, replacing Dr Yahya A. Muhaimin, Indonesia's Minister of National Education.

Musa said various other topics of mutual interest were discussed.

"We agreed to have our first Education Congress in Bangkok from March 26 to 29. The event, with the theme Challenges in the New Millennium, will provide a forum for educators to reflect and discuss emerging trends and challenges and to come up with strategies for education in the future."

"There were 45 topics of discussion. Another one of them concerned poverty alleviation in poor member countries.

"There are ongoing efforts to alleviate poverty in some member countries. They include education in nutrition and tropical medicine."

On the establishment of a Virtual Campus for Seameo countries, Musa said it was on hold due to problems pertaining to policy.

As the new Seameo president, Musa said he would be visiting its regional centres to identify the problems faced by Southeast Asian countries in education.

In his speech during the closing ceremony, Musa said he was confident that Seameo member countries could succeed in overcoming the challenges of the 21st century if all put in greater commitment in exploiting the potentials and opportunities.

"We are a group of countries with a lot of similarities and need each other's counsel and assistance."

(END)