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Education

NEAC SUBMITS 13-POINT EDUCATION SYSTEM CHANGE PROPOSAL

PETALING JAYA, July 24 (Bernama) -- The National Brains Trust, the education system think-tank of the National Economic Action Council (NEAC), has submitted to the government 13 strategic intervention points which it feels should be implemented for the country to create a more vibrant workforce.

Trust chairman Tan Sri Dr Nordin Sopiee said that the 13 intervention points were contained in a report submitted to the NEAC recently and now awaiting cabinet perusal.

"The report includes proposals for the transfer from the present education system to a better one to ensure that Malaysia produces a capable workforce to suit the needs of the nation in the future and to face challenges of globalisation and liberalisation," he said.

He was speaking to reporters after delivering a keynote address at the National Education Conference themed "Educational Excellence in a Globally Competitive Knowledge Economy", here today.

The National Brains Trust, set up two and half months ago, consists of 68 distinguished members from the education industry and in preparing the report held over 23 meetings.

Dr Nordin, who is also chief executive officer of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who heads the NEAC, had looked at the report, compiled with the assistance of the Education Ministry.

"All the intervention points in the report would have catalytic effect in changing the present education system to one which could create a world class workforce...it can be done but could be a bit difficult as it involves some fundamental changes to the education system," he said.

He said that in principle, the report wants to change the whole idea of examination in the education system with stress on application of knowledge rather than learning of facts.

He said that Malaysia was intent on making a massive quantum leap from the Third World to the First World but "unfortunately, the leap from a developing Third World economy to First World economy cannot be achieved unless new standards are set and new results achieved with regard to education."

"A First World economy cannot be built and cannot be run by a Third World workforce, however excellent that Third World workforce might be. If we want to make a quantum leap to the world class workforce, there are at least seven things that we need to do fast," Dr Nordin said.

Firstly, he said, the government needs to make education and human resource development the main priority over the next two decades.

"Secondly, it must fully empower its workforce with good working knowledge of English.

"We must try to ensure that within the next 10 to 15 years, 20 per cent of our workforce is fluent in English, while the large majority must have a reasonable working competence in English," Dr Nordin said.

He also wants the government to ensure adequate investment in the country's schools, especially in the critical foundation years of primary education.

He said that at present, the country spends 20 per cent more on each university student than the average First World state. But the advanced First World country spends 4.6 times more on a primary school child than

Malaysia does.

"Fourthly, we must ensure fundamental curriculum reform where we must lighten the facts overload in the school curriculum and concentrate on the four Rs -- Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic and Reasoning," he said.

The fifth point, Dr Nordin said, was creating some fundamental reform in the present examination system where tests should not be focused on testing mastery of content but the development of skills and competences.

"Sixth, we must put in place fundamental pedagogy reform. We must care less for dead facts and much more for thinking skills. School must not mean misery, learning must be fun. Teachers must be facilitator-educators, not instructor-spoon feeding," he said.

Last but not least, he said, the government must ensure a quantum leap in higher education with the creation of true and solid centres of excellence.

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