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Parents urged to place SAR students in national schools

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Government is urging parents whose children are attending privately-run people's religious schools or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) to transfer them to national schools.

This "invitation" is effective immediately and parents have one month, until Feb 6, to apply for the transfers, said Education Ministry director-general Datuk Abdul Rafie Mahat at the ministry today.

Parents who opt for transfers after the deadline would still be welcomed.

The one-month deadline was meant to ease administrative and logistical preparations, Rafie said.

There are 66,000 students in secondary-level SARs and 8,000 at the primary level in about 260 such schools nationwide.

Parents are to bring their children to the nearest national school for registration.

"I have instructed all Education offices in the States and districts to facilitate the transfers and placements."

Rafie said the Government's reasons for urging the transfers was because the quality of education at national schools was better.

He would not comment if the move was because some SARs have been promoting anti-Government teachings.

"This invitation is made from a professional angle. The quality of education at national schools is far better. But if parents don't want to accept our offer, then they must have their own reasons," he said.

Rafie said State Education offices would arrange briefings with parents to explain the advantages of national school education.

"We have trained teachers, better facilities, updated curricula and even food programmes.

"For parents who are concerned about religious education, national schools also teach Islam, besides science and technical subjects."

He added the ministry had analysed the results of the Penilaian Menengah Rendah 2002 and found the performance of SAR students to be very poor.

The PMR results, which were released earlier this week, showed that only 3.5 per cent of SAR students obtained Grade A in Mathematics, compared with 21 per cent in national schools.

In Science, only 2.2 per cent of SAR students achieved Grade A, compared to 15.4 per cent in national schools; and in English, three per cent of SAR students obtained Grade A, compared to 18.7 per cent in national schools.

About 44 per cent of SAR students received Grade E for English, which means they did not even reach a minimum competency level. In national schools, about 30 per cent of students received an E in English.

Rafie said the safety of pupils in SARs was not certain, as many such schools were housed in shoddy buildings.

He also cited a study by Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Utara Malaysia which found that SAR students had difficulty getting jobs because their education was too focused on religious studies.

In October last year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would stop funding SARs because some schools were teaching students politics instead of religion.

He said funding would only resume after the Government determined which schools were genuine.

On the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English for Standard One, Form One and Lower Six starting next week, Rafie said the Government was fully prepared.

"Everything is in place. I assure parents they need not worry. They should leave it to the teachers and the Government. All the necessary ICT infrastructure needed is ready."

He also announced the ministry's hotline number which parents could call for information about the education system. They can call the ministry's Curriculum Development Centre at 03-62002300.