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Squabbles delay completion of labs

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SEREMBAN, Sat. - Squabbles between contractors and sub-contractors were identified as the cause of the delay in the completion of computer laboratories under Phase One of the Education Ministry's project in Negri Sembilan.

It is understood that squabbles often occurred between contractors, who were awarded the contracts by the ministry, and their sub-contractors.

It is said that the contractors failed to pay their sub-contractors accordingly, resulting in delay and abandonment of the projects in most of the schools in all the districts.

One such project is the computer laboratory in Sekolah Kebangsaan Senawang, which was "dumped" by the contractor more than two years ago after it reached 40 per cent completion.

The school has 70 teachers and 1,895 pupils.

Chairman of the school's Parent-Teacher Association Muzammil Dzulkifli said parents were concerned about the problem.

"The pupils are the one who will lose.

"This is an ambitious project by the Government but, unfortunately, it has fallen into the wrong hands."

Despite the calls by leaders, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, for such projects to be revived nationwide, nothing had been done so far, he said.

"I was told that the SK Senawang project had been sub-contracted from one contractor to another and this subsequently led to delays. We, the parents, were also not informed of the progress of the project.

"When we asked the school, the response was that the project was being handled by the ministry and that we should ask it."

He claimed that other schools with "abandoned computer laboratories" included Sekolah Kebangsaan Kuala Klawang in Jelebu and Sekolah Menengah Pendita Zaaba near here.

He said the Government's policy to have a computer laboratory for each school under the Eighth Malaysia Plan was good.

"However, delays in such projects will only make a mockery of our education system and policy."

The abandoned centre also posed a safety problem to pupils.

"Planks, rusty nails and other building materials that can be found in a project site pose a danger to pupils."

He said: "With the use of English in Mathematics and Science and laptops by teachers, it is only right that the project be revived to complement the effort."

Newly-appointed State Education director Rohani Shariff said under Phase One, the ministry was the one which picked the contractors.

Under Phase Two, the responsibility to award the contract had been entrusted to each State education department.

The computer laboratory of SK Senawang came under Phase One of the project. "There is nothing much we can do as the matter is being handled by the ministry."

He said the ministry had given an assurance that the project would be revived.

He said non-payment by contractors to sub-contractors had resulted in delays.

"The department will handle everything under Phase Two, like selecting

contractors, to overcome problems faced by the ministry under Phase One."

He said the department would pick reliable contractors to ensure the laboratories would be ready on time for pupils.