

Syed Husin: Cluster schools may worsen woes
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Raising the quality of 300 cluster schools will not improve the general condition of education in the country, said Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) deputy president Dr Syed Husin Ali.

"With plenty of money, good equipment, well-trained students and selected teachers, it is possible for these schools to achieve excellence.

"But there is no guarantee that the general condition of the country's education system and its standard will improve overall," he added in a statement today.

The opposition leader was responding to Education Minister Hishamuddin Hussein who announced that cluster schools or 'kelompok sekolah cemerlang' will be introduced by the end of the month.

According to the minister, one of the objectives is to raise the standard of excellence of local educational institutions on par with developed nations.

However, Syed Husin noted that the overall education system in Malaysia is in 'shambles' and quality has declined.

"The gap between schools in developed areas and undeveloped areas has widened, in terms of schools, equipment and teachers. Ethnic polarisation has increased between national and national type schools," he said.

The veteran politician also pointed out that cluster schools are exclusive and elitist.

"They will widen the gap between neglected and privileged schools. To what extent will students from the kampong, plantations and slum areas be able to enter these schools?" he asked.

"Further, there is no guarantee that the teachers and students selected will reflect the ethnic composition of the country. On the other hand, they may even exacerbate polarisation," he added.

'Corruption and favouritism'

As for the statement that the success of cluster schools depends much on the headmaster, Syed Husin said it is not clear what are the basis and process of selecting a headmaster.

"The 10-person advisory board (on cluster schools) announced by the education minister seems to consist of mainly those close and acceptable to the minister and government.

"We are worried that the selection of a headmaster will be influenced by such factors as political, ethnic link and background," he added.

He said the selection must be based on merit and reflect the ethnic composition of the country.

The PKR deputy president also expressed concern that cluster schools will be 'privatised to selected headmasters'.

"Unlimited freedom and lack of supervision can give rise to different types of problems such as corruption, waste, favouritism, cronyism and so forth," he warned

In view of this, he said a strict and firm mechanism must be devised to prevent these abuses from happening.

He also urged the government not to rush and study all aspects and problems of cluster schools before implementing it.

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