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Task force to boost English

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Team to ensure future local grads have good command of language

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KUALA LUMPUR: A special task force has been set up to ensure that future graduates from local universities possess a good command of the English language.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the task force, to be jointly headed by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar and Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh, would look at how universities could improve the marketability of their graduates through improved soft-skills and hands-on training including communications skills.

"Whether we like it or not, English is a pre-requisite in the real world if we are to move forward and ahead in order to compete with the best in the world," he told some 1,200 graduates under the IMalaysia Skills Training Scheme attending a dialogue session here yesterday.

Najib also acknowledged the sensitivity over the issue of language and called on all quarters to put aside their "emotions".

"We cannot be emotional and feel that we do not need English.

"If we say we do not want to be *jaguh kampung* (village champions) and want to succeed at the international level, for that we need a good command of English," he added.

Yesterday, *The Star* highlighted the problem of young doctors in the country who were struggling with their poor command of English.

On Monday, *The Star* also reported that weak English was the main reason some 1,000 medical graduates had ended their ambition of becoming doctors.



Muruku time

Najib showing his skills preparing muruku as his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor (on his right), MIC president Datuk Seri Dr. S. Subramaniam (right) and others look on during the national Deepavali open house in Kulim, Kedah last night.

Najib said yesterday that Bahasa Malaysia was still needed as the national language and was part of our national identity although a shift in emphasis was necessary on the importance of the English language.

He noted that the issue faced by present graduates was the lack of self confidence stemming from their inability to express themselves well.

"Graduates must have a high level of self confidence and be able to express themselves well in at least two languages, namely Bahasa Malaysia and English," he added.

Besides looking at improving graduates' communication skills, Najib said the task force would also look at other aspects which would

make graduates more employable in line with the needs of the industries.

He also announced the implementation of a key performance index (KPI) for local universities which will track the level of marketability of their graduates.

He said the size of future allocations for universities would depend on their KPI results.

"It is no more faculty driven or looking inward, but what the market and Malaysia wants," he said.

"If your graduates are more employable, then you will get more allocation," he said, adding that this was the "deal" under the National Education Blueprint.

Earlier, Najib also announced

that some 15,000 graduates would undergo training under the IMalaysia Training Scheme next year with 22 government-linked companies and the private sector.

Since its inception in 2011, he said some 70,000 graduates participated in the programmes and had secured employment.

Under the programme, graduates will undergo four-month soft training skills and a year of hands-on training with the companies involved under the programme.

A total of RM250mil has been set aside for programme under Budget 2016.