

Pua: Study proves local school system inferior to West's
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 2 — DAP MP Tony Pua has rubbished Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's boast over local education standards, citing today a recent international study that showed Malaysian students lagging far behind western nations in terms of literacy, mathematics and scientific understanding.

Labelling the deputy prime minister a "jaguh kampung" (village hero) for his boast, Pua pointed out that according to the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) 2009+ report released last December, Malaysian students ranked 55th out of 74 countries in terms of reading literacy, 57th in Mathematics and "only marginally better" in 52nd position for Science literacy.

"The results are extremely discouraging on the state of affairs in Malaysia's education system," Pua told a press conference in Parliament today.

The PISA 2009+ study, conducted in 2010 and released last December, reviewed the literacy, mathematics and scientific understanding of 522,000 students across 74 countries, with nearly 4,999 students coming from Malaysia.

Muhyiddin, as the education minister, Pua said, had made "a complete fool" of himself for proudly proclaiming Malaysia's standard of education is far better than that of the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany.

Muhyiddin had made the claim on Saturday, citing a report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) which stated that Malaysian students were getting a better education than their counterparts in the UK, the US and Germany.

The deputy prime minister had pointed out that the WEF's 2011/12 Global Competitiveness Report ranked Malaysia 14th among 142 countries in terms of quality of education.

He was quoting findings in the Executive Opinion Survey portion of the report, which polled top business figures on the competitiveness of various sectors and institutions.

But Pua pointed out today that the WEF study was merely based on the opinions of 87 local businessmen who were asked to rate on a scale of one to seven how much they felt the country's educational system has met the needs of a competitive economy.

He said two government-linked agencies had been commissioned by the WEF to carry out the survey — the government-linked Institute Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) and the government-owned Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC) — suggesting the possibility of biasness in the study's outcome.

"Surely such a tiny survey with such 'surprising' outcomes must be benchmarked against other credible international studies before it is accepted at face value.

“And surely, as the education Minister, he (Muhyiddin) would have seen many objective studies on the quality of our education and students,” Pua said.

Malaysia had achieved a weighted average score of 5.1 in the WEF study, as did Australia, Lebanon and Barbados.

Switzerland, Singapore and Finland led the rankings after each secured a rating of 5.9.

Germany placed 17th with a score of 4.9, Britain came in 20th with 4.8 and the US got the 26th spot with a 4.7 rating.

Despite Malaysia placing 14th, the WEF report said in its summary for Malaysia that as the country becomes more and more innovation-driven, “it will need to improve its performance in education and technological readiness”.

Comparatively, Pua pointed out that the conclusion for Malaysia in the PISA report was completely unlike the WEF’s when it was reported that only “56 per cent of students are estimated to have a proficiency in reading literacy that is at or above the baseline level needed to participate actively and productively in life”.

This, he said, meant that a whopping 44 per cent of Malaysian students had scored below the baseline level.

For mathematics, the PISA study revealed that only 41 per cent of students are proficient in the subject at the baseline level.

For science, 57 per cent made the baseline level.

“Why did Muhyiddin not cite the PISA study which he is fully aware of, which is the objective in its study across countries using standardised tests?”

“PISA was also conducted with the co-operation of the Education Ministry... (but) instead, Muhyiddin decided to endorse and boast of a survey of 87 local businessmen on a single, subjective question,” Pua said.

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