

Malaysia Matches Words With Action At UNESCO

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From Muin Abdul Majid

GENEVA, April 16 (Bernama) -- There is no denying Malaysia's perseverance in its efforts to secure a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) executive board membership for the 2015-2019 term.

The latest round of initiatives saw Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin graced specially drawn-up events on a working visit to Paris and Geneva with a view to ramping up support for Malaysia's candidature.

In between discussions with key UNESCO officials and envoys, including those from Islamic countries, Kuala Lumpur slotted in a mesmerising cultural show at Place du Palais Royal and mounted a fascinating exhibition on the country's intangible cultural heritage at the UNESCO headquarters at Place de Fontenoy, both in Paris.

On Malaysia's chances of securing a seat, Muhyiddin, who is Education Minister, said the response had been positive so far with engagements with a number of ambassadors pointed to new commitments to back Malaysia's bid.

"Insya-Allah, we still have time. We don't want to be overly confident as we continue with our efforts. Even our ministers have been asked to highlight Malaysia's intention to be on the executive board when they go for official duty overseas," he said.

Malaysia is no stranger to UNESCO programmes and activities, having joined the organisation in 1958 and becoming a member of its executive board for several terms, the last one between 2007 and 2011.

UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova had, in fact, described Malaysia as a very good partner of the 195-member organisation.

Acknowledging that Malaysia had ideas and was making an impact in its involvement with UNESCO, Bokova encouraged the Southeast Asian country to pursue further modalities of cooperation.

She also expressed a desire for an even more active role that Malaysia, also a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), could play in UNESCO, including in the fight against terrorism, extremism and Islamophobia.

In this regard, she agreed that Malaysia and Indonesia might well be in the position to play a prominent role in the proper teaching and learning of Islam to counter the threats posed by those who were tarnishing the Islamic faith.

Muhyiddin took the opportunity to highlight the fact that the Islamic education curriculum

in Malaysia was aimed at moulding a moderate and tolerant society.

Observers also noted that Malaysia did not indulge in mere rhetorics as proven by the establishment of the Malaysia-UNESCO Cooperation Programme (MUCP) which had approved projects worth more than US\$5 million over a period of two years.

The 17 projects focused on Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries, Africa and South-South Cooperation.

The latest is the US\$300,000 assistance announced by Muhyiddin on Wednesday to UNESCO's Geneva-based International Bureau of Education (IBE) to implement its programme to boost Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curricula for girls in Africa and Asia Pacific.

"We'll continue to expand MUCP as we have a pact with UNESCO until 2017. After that period, if we have the resources, we may continue with the programme," Muhyiddin said, adding that Bokova was highly appreciative of this initiative taken by Malaysia.

Malaysia's leading role in UNESCO, its moderate stand as well as economic strides appeared to have not gone unnoticed as she extended an invitation to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak to deliver a keynote address at the UNESCO General Conference in November.

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