

# Aiming for the complete student

The Education Ministry will be going all out from this month to make co-curricular activities a priority in schools as participation among students has not reached the level desired. Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein tells CHOK SUAT LING the new approaches to boost participation and explains why being active outside the classrooms is crucial



Alam Shah brass band and Convent Bukit Nanas F1 Technology Challenge team did.

Co-curricular activities can also encourage integration among students.

We will soon be launching a Rimup (Students Integration Plan for Unity) project called "F1 in Schools", which will see students designing model racing cars, and a robotics programme.

Teams comprising Malay, Chinese and Indian students will be formed to participate in the contests.

**Q:** It has been said that student participation in co-curricular activities is still far from satisfactory.

**A:** When I first came to this ministry, a senior ministry official jokingly told me that while co-curricular activities were compulsory in schools, it was *tak berdosa* (not a sin) if not carried out.

It might have been a joke but it reflected the reality of what was happening in schools. Even though the policy was clear, many factors impeded the implementation.

**Q:** Your ministry will concen-

**Q:** Your ministry will concentrate on building human capital with special focus on co-curricular activities, under the second thrust of the National Education Blueprint 2006-2010. What do you want to achieve?

**A:** We want our human capital to be knowledgeable, have skills that are relevant to the times and be able to compete in a globalised world.

We want people with new ideas, who are critical and creative, adept at problem-solving, able to create new opportunities and adaptable to changes.

We do not want human capital that is self-centred and lacking in values. They need to be principled, respectful of differences in others, and be good and effective leaders.

**Q:** How do you hope to achieve this?

**A:** We will give young people every means to enhance their potential. To achieve this, we have formulated several strategies. A wide range of opportunities will be open to them to pursue their interests.

We are also reviewing the school assessment system to enable students to have a good grasp of all areas of knowledge.

We do not want students to fall back on their studies to the extent that they drop out of school.

We will be reviewing certain aspects related to the curriculum, co-curriculum and sports. We will also be strengthening pro-



grammes related to the acculturation of good social values and discipline.

The 3K programme which focuses on cleanliness, health and safety awareness will also be given a boost.

**Q:** What is the role of co-curricular activities in building human capital?

**A:** Not everything can be taught in classrooms through a formal curriculum. Many values we hope to inculcate in students cannot be

derived from books and theories alone.

Students need to be exposed to real life outside the classrooms. That is why co-curricular activities are important.

If we carry out activities in a planned and practical manner, we can mould students into well-rounded people who are balanced emotionally and intellectually.

**Q:** How would participation benefit students?

**A:** Being in a uniformed unit can

help build team work, mental and physical endurance, patriotism, discipline and other skills.

Joining a club which focuses on school subjects can help deepen a student's knowledge. Being active in sports and games can help strengthen physical and mental health.

With a conducive environment and proper guidance, co-curricular activities can boost the talent, skills and competitive spirit of students to the extent of them being able to compete at an international level, like what the Sekolah

tion.

In 2004, it was found that the participation of students in co-curricular activities was not up to mark, with only 56 per cent of secondary schools students involved in uniformed units.

There was a series of workshops to identify the source of the problem. It was found that there were weaknesses in the policy statement, allocation, facilities and the attitude of parents.

Changes were needed not only at school level but also in ministry divisions at state and district levels. A memorandum was presented to the cabinet and approved.

**Q:** What are the factors prohibiting proper implementation?

**A:** The main problem is the attitude of parents, teachers and school administrators who place priority on academic achievement.

This attitude stems from a lack of clear incentives and penalties. For instance, entry into the matriculation programme in the past did not require a co-curriculum merit.

Before this, too, entry into public universities was wholly dependent on academic achievement.

Another problem was lack of allocation. In 2004, for example, each student was only allocated RM2.56 a year.

This sum was too small for the three areas of compulsory participation — uniformed units; clubs and societies; and, sports and games.

Those from poor families could

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*Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein  
 Education Minister*



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not afford to participate.

The area that can be used for activities in schools is also limited. There is a shortage of skilled and trained officers, not just at the ministry level but also at states, districts and schools, to carry out co-curricular activities.

**Q: What has been done to resolve the problems?**

**A:** The ministry proposed a review of seven aspects, the most important being a strengthening of policy to increase the participation of students, trainee teachers and lecturers at teacher training institutes and matriculation colleges in co-curricular activities.

We have given value to participation in schools.

Being active in co-curricular activities is now an entry criteria to schools and higher educational institutions.

We will continue making co-curricular participation a pre-requisite for entry into fully residential schools, religious secondary schools, technical schools and teaching programmes offered by the ministry.

It will also be a main criteria for entry into our matriculation programmes.

We worked closely with the Higher Education Ministry to formulate a suitable and practical evaluation system for student participation.

**Q: Who will guide the schools in implementation?**

**A:** We have established a Co-curriculum Development Committee and a District Co-curriculum Monitoring Team to plan and develop activities, guide schools and monitor expenditure.

I would like to stress again that the involvement of students in co-curricular activities is compulsory and the ministry encourages the

formation of more uniformed units in schools.

We have also directed that training modules at teacher training institutions and public universities fulfil the co-curricular requirements of schools.

We want teachers to not only be active but also have the expertise to manage and train students.

**Q: Has allocation for activities increased?**

**A:** It has increased four-fold for primary school students at RM10 each a year, and five-fold for secondary school students at RM12 each a year.

At the same time, the ministry is also giving RM50,000 for co-curriculum management at every district. The total allocation is RM106 million.

This sum does not include that for sports management and the participation of students in contests at international level.

But for schools that want to set up high-cost activities like wind orchestras and brass bands, the allocation is not enough.

These schools and parents can seek help from others, like the Defence Ministry which is helping in the running of the cadet corps.

**Q: The ministry had mentioned the internationalisation of co-curricular programmes. What does this involve?**

**A:** To achieve this, we have to be sensitive to education developments in other countries. We have to compare our indicators to theirs, and learn from them.

We need a mechanism that will enable us to expose, exchange, assess and compare our product with other countries.

One way is by being active in international educational organisations like Unesco, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and De-

velopment's Programme for International Student Assessment and International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

We can also evaluate the achievement of our students through exams run by international bodies like Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

This will enable us to compare the standing of our students with those in other countries.

Besides academic achievement, we can also see how our co-curricular achievements compare against their counterparts abroad by participating in international-level competitions.

**Q: Have we participated in many international competitions?**

**A:** In science and technology, we have sent our students for the F1 Technology Challenge in Australia, International Science and Engineering Fair in the United States, International Chemistry Olympiad in Korea, World Robotics Olympiad in China and other competitions.

Our students did very well. In the F1 Technology Challenge in Australia recently, teams from developed countries had said they wanted to beat the record of the fastest car set by the Malaysian team last year.

Next year, we will host the F1 Technology Challenge with teams from 22 countries.

Another approach is by establishing school linkages which can lead to international school-based activities.

We also share our experiences with education ministries in other countries on matters we are more advanced in, like school co-operatives.

Through these measures, we hope students will learn how to interact with their peers from other

countries and engage them in healthy competition.

We want our students to be confident, realise they are not much different from others, and that they can be better than their peers from developed countries.

**Q: Are you satisfied with how things are progressing now?**

**A:** We still have a long way to go. Many things need to be rectified and improved, especially where infrastructure, equipment and allocation are concerned for the involvement of our students in international meets and training.

More teaching posts need to be created and there must be more officers to run co-curricular activities at all levels.

There is still a lot that needs to be done to rejuvenate co-curricular activities in primary schools. We need to give more attention to the young pupils.

We can see the political commitment when co-curriculum points are made a pre-requisite for university entry and this has made students more enthusiastic in co-curricular activities. The attitude of parents has also changed somewhat and the school administrators are now more serious in carrying out activities.

**Q: What else is in the pipeline?**

**A:** I have entrusted (Education Ministry parliamentary secretary) Komala Devi to monitor and carry out all that has been planned.

Last month, many activities were launched — a co-curriculum gala, camps, wind orchestra competition and a royal concert.

If this momentum continues, co-curricular activities will positively impact our efforts to build high-quality human capital.

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