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First CCEM in Malaysia

The 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, a triennial event, will be a platform for leaders, ministers, and professionals in education to discuss critical elements in the Commonwealth.

LESTER KONG

There will be several firsts for Malaysia during the upcoming 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) from June 15 to 19.

The country would be hosting the conference for the first time in CCEM's 50 years of history since it was first held in Oxford, Britain in 1959.

It marks the Commonwealth's recognition of Malaysia's success in education and overall development since Merdeka, said Education Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Zulkurnain Awang.

"This event is important for others to assess what we have done so far.

"People from other countries would say we have done well and some say we have not.

"But by having this conference here, it allows everyone to see how we have performed. Not just in terms of education but how we have progressed so far," he said.

The conference is a triennial event and a platform for national leaders, education ministers, teachers and other individuals involved in education policy making and capacity building to discuss critical education elements in the Commonwealth.

Themed, 'Education in the Commonwealth: Towards and Beyond Global Goals and Targets', this year's conference will focus on discussing the effectiveness of the Commonwealth education system to meet the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in education.

"It would give Commonwealth leaders the opportunity and platform to develop a direction to bring education excellence to greater heights," said Zulkurnain.

He said the MDG, out of eight goals, includes achieving universal primary education by 2015 and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015.

This year's event will be held at Levels Four and Five of the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre and will be co-hosted by the Education Ministry, Higher Education Ministry and the Commonwealth Secretariat

and launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on June 16.

As many as 1,500 leaders, opinion shapers and stakeholders including youths are expected to participate in one of the most important education-related events on the world's calendar.

Another first for this conference would be the Vice-Chancellors Forum where more than 100 university vice-

chancellors are expected to attend.

"It was decided in Cape Town (16th CCEM) that because education is a continuous process, starting from pre-school to tertiary education, issues of education should be discussed together in this sort of forum," said Zulkurnain.

The Education Ministers meeting will be held from June 16 to 18 with the objective of outlining the member countries' progress in six action-areas that were discussed at the 16th CCEM held in Cape Town, South Africa on 2006.

These areas were Achieving Universal Primary Education, Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education, Improving Quality in Education, Using Distance Learning to Overcome Barriers, Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances and Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education Systems.

The senior officers would be meeting to endorse critical education issues before they are brought to the ministers. "If it's only ministers alone, it would be a one-way traffic

but now we will have two-way communication," he said.

The conference will also consist of concurrently-held and individual forums of discussion for stakeholders, youth, teachers (including principals and headmasters) and vice-chancellors.

Stakeholders, teachers and vice-chancellor forums will be held from June 15 to 18 while the youth forum will be from June 9 to 18.

The Stakeholders Forum will give experts and opinion leaders from many sectors relevant to education a chance to air their views.

The forum will be bringing together members of the civil society, the private sector, academic and other non-state personnel involved in Commonwealth education.

Besides the main theme 'Making Connections and Building Partnerships: Towards and Beyond Global Goals and Targets', the forum would also contain sub-themes to talk about education concerns that were central to the Education for All (EFA) and MDGs.

Its objectives are to assess the progress of key decisions taken at previous Commonwealth and other international educational platforms, promote new thinking and fresh ideas on partnerships and collaboration between stakeholders.

Teachers, principals and headmas-

ters of primary and secondary schools will undoubtedly play a large role in the conference through the Teachers Forum, held for the first time during the previous conference in South Africa in 2006.

Sharing of good practices, discussion on issues of concern to the teaching profession such as remuneration, gender equality and training will be addressed during the Teachers Forum.

It would also be opened to those involved in the management and training of teachers.

Zulkurnain said the Youth Forum would be one to watch as it addressed issues of how the youth assist in providing vital input on education policy changes and development.

"The youths, who will be the leaders of the future, can play a big role by providing their opinions. By listening to them on how the future of the country should be managed particularly in education," he said.

Besides the ministerial meeting and the forums, the winners of the Commonwealth Good Practice Awards 2009 will be announced and several Malaysian projects are vying for three awards out of 49 submission from 14 countries.

Also over 100 exhibition booths would be put up for governments, education institutions, NGOs and the private sector to showcase their policies, projects and products to the delegates of the 17th CCEM.

As the host country, Zulkurnain said the conference also provided an excellent opportunity to bring together the latest innovation and thinking in education techniques from the Commonwealth.

"At the same time, it is also to promote Malaysia as a tourism destination and attract foreign exchange," he said, adding that the conference would encourage an exchange of cultures across the diverse Commonwealth.

"It will allow better understanding among each other's culture, problems and issues so that we can create a better world in the future, rather than having upheavals.

"We can showcase that despite the plurality and diversity of Malaysia, we can still live and work together," he said.

»This will allow everyone to see how well we have performed«

TAN SRI ZULKURNAIN AWANG

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forums in education to discuss critical elements



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