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Schools must halt decline in English

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OF late a number of reports and comments have appeared in the Press concerning the need to master the English language.

This is so that Malaysians can communicate effectively internationally and seek greater advancement in the field of science and technology, particularly in the area of IT.

One cannot but be concerned about the deteriorating standard of English in the country, particularly the poor proficiency among schoolchildren.

The recently released UPSR English results showed a decline in the percentage of passes in English. Although it was a marginal decline of 0.2 per cent to 56.7, it should be a matter of concern to education officials.

Every year when the results of major public examinations are released, more often than not, they show a decline in passes.

At a time when Malaysians are being told that the future of the nation lies in IT, one must realise that English is the language of information and technology.

Without proficiency in English how does one expect to master IT?

For years concerned educationists have spoken about falling standard of English in our schools.

Many students whose English is poor have entered universities and joined the workforce. A great number of them have difficulty conversing in English during job interviews.

Despite claims by the authorities that steps are being taken to address the issue, the fact remains that the declining standards remain a cause for concern.

More effective and concrete steps need to be taken to improve the learning and teaching of English.

Students should be encouraged to use and speak English among themselves so that they would be fluent in the language.

It is not only in schools that concern has been expressed about the declining standard of English.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad saw it fit to advise Barisan Nasional MPs to master English, so that it would help them in their dealing with people abroad or when conversing with foreign guests.

The Prime Minister said a good command of English would also enable the MPs to obtain information on current issues from the Internet.

During the recent 2001 Budget presentation in Parliament, Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin repeatedly stressed the importance of the English language, especially if one wanted to master the Internet and ICT and derive greater benefits from the New Economy.

He called on students to learn the English language as it was the main language of the ICT world.

The Prime Minister's views on the English language are rational and should be heeded by all Malaysians.

It needs to be pointed out that greater emphasis on the use of English must not be seen as a move to discourage the use of the National Language, which has been accepted by all Malaysians regardless of their races.

In this modern age, knowledge of just one language is not enough. We need to have a command of other languages for progress and development.

English is the international language for science, technology, business and commerce. We should adopt a liberal attitude with regard to the use of English and other languages.

Mastering English is an asset for communication especially at international meetings and conferences where it is widely and commonly used.

At a time when Malaysians have been urged to help the country fulfil its vision of becoming a fully-developed nation by 2020, it would be useful for us to be bilingual, where we not only respect our National Language but also master the English language or any other language of our choice at the same time.

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