

Cautious 'aye' to re-introducing English-medium school system

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. Bring it back. This is the general reaction to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's remarks yesterday that English could be re-introduced as the medium of instruction in schools.

Educationists, politicians and a prominent unionist agreed that the move was feasible but would require much work.

The Prime Minister had said that the Government would re-introduce English to arrest the language's decline if it was the will of the rakyat.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Educational Studies lecturer Dr Arshad Abdul Samad said bringing back English should be carried out "very carefully".

He said any implementation should be done slowly and start with pilot projects.

"The biggest hurdle in implementing the system would be providing enough teachers proficient in English, yet knowledgeable in their various fields," said Arshad, who is also director of the Malaysia International Centre for English Language Teaching.

Hazidi A. Hamid, a lecturer with the Department of English Language and Literature, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, felt that while the idea was potentially good, it was not without pitfalls.

He agreed that implementation would prove a little difficult and have to involve various stages.

Some, however, felt the suggestion was drastic, preferring other options to improving the standard of English.

UPM Test of English as a Second Language lecturer Dr Fauziah Hassan believed that more emphasis should be given to speaking and listening skills for students to improve their English. "It is perfectly healthy to maintain Bahasa Malaysia as a medium of instruction.

"However, the attitude that learning and mastering English is un-nationalistic should be discarded before we can improve."

Educationist and social activist F.R. Bhupalan believed that the teacher training system should be reviewed, with more effective supervision of teachers in class.

"We have to have good quality teachers to begin with," she said.

She made the reminder that people from lower income groups and rural areas spoke Bahasa Malaysia

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and that these groups would be further marginalised if the medium of instruction was changed.

Social activist Datuk Lee Lam Thye said promoting the use of English did not jeopardise the importance and use of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language.

He said it was an indisputable fact that the standard of English has declined to a level that was too low to cope with the nation's needs.

DAP deputy chairman Karpal Singh congratulated the Prime Minister. He said Dr Mahathir had

made a bold statement in saying that the Government was willing to re-introduce the English-medium school system.

He said the statement should be the catalyst to improving the standard of English in the country.

Karpal also called on Pas to emulate Dr Mahathir in publicly calling for an emphasis on the English language and he urged Pas leaders to improve their English if they hoped to form the next Government.

"While the national language should retain pride of place, English should not be neglected and discarded in the name of national-

ism," he said.

Gerakan vice-president Datuk Dr S. Vijayaraj said the re-introduction of English would not lead to the sidelining of Bahasa Malaysia as the people were generally fluent in the national language.

The Malaysian Trades' Union Congress said English would help workers obtain better jobs and enhance skills.

Its president, Zainal Rampak, said Malaysia would be able to improve its competitive edge, especially in the context of the Asean Free Trade Area.