

# ***Ling: English to be a strong subject***

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KLJALA LUMPUR: While no decision was made by the Cabinet yesterday on the proposal to reintroduce English-medium schools, ministers voted unanimously in favour of strengthening the teaching and learning of English in schools.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the Cabinet had decided to "bring back English as a strong subject" as this was necessary for Malaysians to enter the k-economy (knowledge economy).

"Details will be worked out by the Education Ministry," he told reporters after the weekly Cabinet meeting here yesterday.

He was commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement three days ago that the Government would consider reintroducing English-medium schools if the people felt this was necessary to improve Malaysians' proficiency in English.

At a separate function at Putrajaya yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated that the Government wanted to hear the people's views on the proposal to reintroduce English-medium schools in the country.

"Some say the failure to get jobs is not because of poor command of English . . . we don't know whether this is true or not but we need to know the (public) reaction," he told reporters after hosting a luncheon for visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri at Seri Perdana here.

Bernama reports that when asked if the government would conduct a study on the matter, Dr Mahathir said: "Many people have made studies, so we want to hear from the people. If the people say give priority to the national language over getting jobs, we will abide by their view," he said.

Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the re-introduction of English-medium schools could help the younger generation to be proficient in the language.

He said the Malacca Government supported the proposal and such schools could be set up in every district.

"English-medium schools will also attract foreign students to the state and country."

Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the proposal should be studied in depth and suggested science and mathematics he taught in

would hamper efforts to foster national integration.

Umno Youth president Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said encouraging an equal dual-language system at school would be a more suitable move. "We feel that using English as the medium of instruction for a few selected subjects will be a better alternative than the blanket reintroduction of English-medium schools.

"By establishing two main mediums of instruction? it will not only improve proficiency in English among students but also advance national integration," he said, adding the importance of English could not be denied and Malays especially should improve their command of the language.

Member of Parliament for Tambun Datuk Husni Hanadzlah said Malaysians would have to first accept that English was the universal *lingua franca* to understand the importance of mastering the language.

He said it was imperative for Malaysians to master the language "as globalisation is already knocking on our door".

He pointed out that globalisation covered not only economy, technology and trade but also politics.

English and the other subjects in Bahasa Malaysia.

"As a former educationist, I feel this approach needs to be done very carefully and in a systematic manner, beginning with the group of science and mathematics teachers," he said.

He added that it was important to master the English language to face challenges from developing nations such as China, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia.

Umno Youth, in a press statement, urged the government to reconsider the proposal to introduce English-medium schools which they felt