

14/11/2002

Belabouring a done deal

JUST what is Dong Jiao Zong now trying to do? Or undo? Barely a fortnight after parties in the Barisan Nasional came together in exemplary fashion to straighten out differences over the approach to the using of English in the teaching of Science and Mathematics, in comes that damper of a pronouncement from this group of Chinese educationists about the new programme spelling "disaster" for Chinese schools in Malaysia. Coming right on the heels of its stern opposition to the Government's Vision School project to encourage racial integration among schoolchildren, the latest bodge speaks decibels of the group's nothing but parochial and chauvinistic oddity.

It must have skipped the minds of those in Dong Jiao Zong, which represents Chinese school committees' and teachers' associations, that the Government had made a decision on the matter; that this decision was reached through a consensus of all BN parties; that the parties included Chinese-based parties that certainly represent the interests of many more people than Dong Jiao Zong; and that consensus requires a certain degree of sacrifice and compromise from all sides.

The group may regard the right to speak up as one of the hallmarks of democracy. But equally sacrosanct in a democratic system are the rights of the majority. In this case, it was in true democratic spirit that the issue was adopted - even described as a win-win formula by the MCA and Gerakan, both of which had initially expressed their own reservations about the whole idea.

It may also be true that by saying what they said, Dong Jiao Zong members were merely trying to be seen as fighting for the interests of the community since most of them are members of the boards of management of Chinese schools which substantially rely on funds and grants from Chinese organisations and individuals. It may also be a pro forma protest note before grudging acquiescence. But it is wiser still to know when and where the buck stops. The debate on this needlessly fraught subject has ended. If they insist on prolonging it, these people will have no choice but to face the consequences. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently said, this is Malaysia, not China.