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Decision rests with Cabinet (HL)

Ridzwan Abdullah; Jason Gerald

KUANTAN, Sun. - The Cabinet will decide on the Government's proposal to teach Science and Mathematics in English in primary schools next year, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had arrived at the proposal after extensive consultation with various quarters.

The Prime Minister, he said, had been considering the matter for a long time, holding extensive consultation with political parties, groups involved in the educational sector, non-governmental organisations and intellectuals.

"Dr Mahathir has said that as the head of Government, he doesn't want the country to lose out when a decision is made later," he said after opening the Pahang Barisan Nasional convention here.

He said Dr Mahathir had often emphasised that the decision had to take into account the future of the students.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had never held such consultations, except when the country was facing the economic downturn in 1997.

He said the BN supreme council meeting on Tuesday would discuss reservations among component parties on the matter, with the Cabinet making the final decision.

He said a final decision had not been made on the matter as discussions were still on-going.

"At this point in time, I believe discussions on the matter are not over. A final decision on the proposal must be made in the Cabinet as it is a government policy."

Commenting on the MCA central committee's unanimous decision to oppose the Government's proposal on the matter, Abdullah said differences in opinion could be resolved at the BN meeting and in the Cabinet.

Noting that the MCA's stand on the matter was made at the party level, he said any decision on government policy had to go through the Cabinet.

"Eventually, the Cabinet will make a decision," he added.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik was reported to have told the CC meeting on Friday that he was in favour of promoting English proficiency among students.

However, it is understood Dr Ling had said this should not be done by using English as a medium of instruction, except in the teaching of the language itself.

Dr Ling also proposed that the use of English to teach Science and Mathematics should start only in secondary schools.

Abdullah said any decision made after consultation and brainstorming with various groups must be accepted as it would be a consensus decision.

Drawing a parallel between Dr Mahathir's advocacy of the initiative to the way in which the economic downturn was tackled, he said:

"At that time, our approach initially created doubts and drew criticism from the international community. It eventually proved to be effective."

Also present were Menteri Besar and State Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Adnan Yaakob, BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Paya Besar MP Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Others were State MCA chairman Datuk Chan Kong Choy, State MIC chairman Datuk R. Sinnathamby, State Gerakan chairman Chia Kwang Chye, State PPP chairman S. Subrayan and Pahang BN leaders and members.

