

21/07/2002

English at three levels next year (HL)

Chok Suat Ling

SEREMBAN, Sat. - Science and Mathematics will be taught in English in Standard One, Form One and Lower Six in all national schools next year.

Ending months of speculation over the issue today, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, in announcing the details of implementation approved by the Cabinet yesterday, said schools were encouraged to also teach the two subjects in English for the other levels of education.

He said the teaching of the two subjects would be fully in English when the students in Standard One, Form One and Lower Six progress to higher levels (graphics on P2).

However, if it was found that teachers and students could cope well, "we may shorten the time frame of implementation and do things faster", Musa added.

"We expect initial problems and, as always, we will be accused of changing things too fast but we will give schools all the assistance they need."

Musa said public universities would also teach Science and Mathematics courses in English in time.

"At present, the medium of instruction for courses like engineering is already in English in many universities," Musa said after closing Sekolah Menengah Agama Persekutuan Labu's 20th anniversary celebrations.

Also present was Education director-general Datuk Abdul Rafie Mahat, who headed a committee set up to determine the method of implementation.

Abdul Rafie had briefed and submitted his report to the Cabinet, which held a special meeting yesterday chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the issue.

Musa said teachers would also be given attractive incentives.

The Cabinet decided that:

- * All teachers who teach Science, Mathematics and English will be given a "critical subject incentive" which will be five per cent of their pay;
- * All teachers who master English and acquire a desired level (the level will be decided later) will be given a triple increment;
- * Teacher trainers (teachers who train other teachers) in Science, Mathematics and English under the Malaysian Trainers Development Programme will be promoted one grade from the DG3 graduate scale to DG2; and
- * A special allowance will be given to Science, Mathematics and English teachers posted to rural schools.

The Government has given "sufficient allocation" for the next five years to cover the incentives as well as other necessary infrastructure.

According to Musa, public examinations like the Primary School Assessment Test (UPSR), Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR), Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), and Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) for the two subjects would be bilingual from next year.

This means the exam paper would contain questions in both English and Bahasa Malaysia, and students can choose to answer in either language.

"The papers for the two subjects will be fully in English from 2008 for the UPSR, 2005 for the PMR, 2007 for SPM and STPM and 2004 for matriculation."

For matriculation colleges, the two subjects will be taught in English from 2004, while in polytechnics, it will start in 2008.

Musa was confident that Form Six and matriculation students would be able to cope as they were all "good students".

He said no decision has been made as to whether the move would also be introduced in national-type Chinese and Tamil schools as it must first be discussed "at the political-level".

Elaborating on the reasons behind the move, Musa said it was viewed as imperative in order that students have a solid foundation in Science and Mathematics.

He added that the move was purely to enhance the knowledge of students in the two subjects, and not really a platform for them to learn English.

"This is because the bulk of information and knowledge in science and technology is in English. The contents of the Science and Mathematics syllabus also change with time unlike other subjects.

"At the same time, students' contact time with English will be increased."

He said the report by the committee was made after taking into consideration the views of many parties.

Musa added that the Cabinet yesterday directed the Ministry to give full attention towards making this new policy a success.

"It also called on teachers, students, parents and the rest of society to give their full support to the policy."