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It is time the silent majority started speaking up on issues

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ONCE again Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke of the silent majority when commenting that the proposal for the use of English in teaching Maths and Science had the support of most Malaysians.

His observation is in all likelihood correct. Listening to the talk on the street, it's hard to find dissenting views which seem to be very loud over the mass media. The reality seems to be that the average Malaysian understands the need for us to implement certain measures that would ensure that our children are well equipped to face the challenges of the future.

Why then are those who agree less vocal compared to the vociferous protestations of the minority who disagree?

This phenomenon of not wanting to be too "loud", not wanting to get involved, is nothing new. Each time an issue of importance surfaces, opposing views will immediately be heard. These dissenting views surface swiftly and reverberate loudly although everyone knows the majority of Malaysians support the idea.

In the tumultuous political climate of 1999, for example, you would think that it was all over for the ruling coalition, if you heard the loudest voices. In the end however, the silent majority spoke in their silence, and delivered the Barisan Nasional a resounding victory.

It's the same, time and again. Perhaps it's part of our value system and culture that does not encourage us to state an opinion. We often prefer to see which way the wind blows before we react. Often we do not even follow the direction of the winds - we just chose not to say anything until we know for certain.

Perhaps, it's a case of misapplying the rule that "silence is tacit approval".

As we move towards a more competitive and dynamic era, we need not only to progress physically as a nation, but our minds and attitudes must also change accordingly. Malaysians must begin to understand that their opinions matter and that they need to say something sometimes, even if it is just to agree.

Our power as a people in a democratic and free country does not lie in just casting our votes once every few years. It also lies in the fact that we have channels to voice our opinions.

We have leaders who are accessible and we have the comfort in knowing that in all probability, given the right circumstances, our two sen worth may be worth a lot more than the proverbial two sen.

Perhaps it's time to decide what sort of a society we want to live in and what sort of society we want to prepare for the future. Perhaps it's time to look at how we educate our children with regard to them being outspoken and forthright or otherwise in expressing their views.

If this attitude of silence that most of us Malaysians have originated in our early education, perhaps it's time we gave closer scrutiny to those crucial formative years in our children's lives to ensure a more pro-active and participative future generation.

We must be aware that as citizens, we have much to contribute in shaping our nation's destiny.

It would do good for Malaysia if her people would lend their voices to the cause of ensuring that she's on the right track towards progress and