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MCA says no to Dr M on English (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The MCA central committee has unanimously decided to oppose the Government's proposal to teach Science and Mathematics in English in all Chinese primary schools next year.

The party's highest decision-making body yesterday made its clearest stand yet on the controversial issue, four days ahead of the Barisan Nasional supreme council meeting on Tuesday.

It is learnt that at the two-hour meeting, president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who was the first to speak, said 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, who is Transport Minister, also proposed that the use of English to teach Science and Mathematics should start only in Chinese secondary schools.

The proposal to teach Science and Mathematics in English was made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Umno general assembly in June.

It was subsequently announced by Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad that it would be implemented in Standard One, Form One and Lower Six from next year for national schools.

No decision has been made for Chinese and Tamil schools, but various groups, including the influential Chinese educationist movement Dong Jiao Zhong, have vehemently opposed the proposal.

MCA, the second-largest component party in the Barisan Nasional, had, before this, been non-committal.

Dr Ling, in particular, had remained tight-lipped over the issue which he constantly said was best discussed "outside the glare of the media".

Yesterday, Dr Ling asked all the committee members present to give their views on the issue.

It is understood that all agreed with Dr Ling that English should not be used as a medium of instruction, with several suggesting that bilingual textbooks be used to teach Science and Mathematics in primary schools.

Of the 41 committee members, 14 were absent including deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek who is on vacation in Australia, and vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng who is in China.

It is understood that Dr Ling would convey the MCA central committee's stand to the Government at the BN supreme council meeting.

At the MCA annual general meeting on July 27, secretary-general Datuk Seri Dr Ting Chew Peh, when replying to points raised by delegates, had said the party would defend the characteristics of Chinese schools.

In August, Chinese-based parties in BN - MCA, Gerakan, Sabah Progressive Party, Liberal Democratic Party and Sarawak United People's Party - had reached a common stand after a series of high-level talks.

They however did not announce their stand.

So far, only Gerakan has made public its stand when the party made a counter-proposal that only secondary schools teach Science and Mathematics in English.

Gerakan also proposed that English terminology be introduced in textbooks in both subjects in Standard Four, with some bilingual text be used in Standard Five and Six.

Umno, on the other hand, has been supportive of the move since the idea was proposed by Dr Mahathir. Umno leaders were of the view that such a move was needed to ensure that Malaysians were on par with other countries.