

15/09/2002

Much to be thankful for

Appa

DEAR Son,

Seriously, I didn't expect this much opposition when the Government announced plans to teach Science and Maths in English. But, as you point out, quite a few are unhappy with the move.

You say one of the strongest reasons for the teaching of subjects in the mother tongue in the early stages of one's educational development was given by none other than Royal Professor Ungku A. Aziz.

You quote him as saying: "The use of a pupil's mother tongue is the most effective and direct way for a pupil of any race to acquire knowledge and to reason... a new concept or a new idea could be better understood by a pupil in his or her own mother tongue. This is because when people are faced with a complex idea, they naturally try to think about it in their mother tongue... English is a comparatively difficult language. In trying to use English to learn Science and Mathematics at the elementary level, pupils may run into problems arising from the use of the language."

Your teacher friend's assertion that the teaching of science and maths in English is a launchpad for Malays to take over the headship of vernacular schools is far-fetched. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself has said there is no ulterior motive.

Your friend says when Christian missions were actively running schools, the standard of education and discipline was very high in those schools but this is not the case today.

I have heard the same complaint too. The school you studied in, Sekolah Kebangsaan La Salle Brickfields, was recently downgraded to a B school. And its physical condition is rather bad. One of the sad features of our school system is that there is a wide gap in the facilities at national, national-type (especially Tamil) schools and most ex-mission schools.

This is a pity as you have one group of children suffering under lesser conditions through no fault of theirs. I pray that politicians and community leaders will see the problem as one involving children who are the future of this nation and not view it wearing parochial lenses.

I'm so glad you went to temple and offered a prayer on Merdeka Day. I think Malaysians must never forget how fortunate we are to be able to enjoy independence and peace. While we criticise the things that are wrong in the country, we must appreciate those that are good.

Look around you. There is so much strife and misery in many countries. Almost everyday there is some news about clashes and agitation in Indonesia. Ethnic violence is common and the country is suffering from an insurgency in Aceh. The Philippines is struggling to ensure stability, fighting insurgents and communists to keep the country whole. In Vietnam and Cambodia too there is unrest. Myanmar is not a democratic nation. Amidst all this, we are a relatively stable and prosperous nation.

Listen to this poem sent to me by uncle Balasubramaniam Rengiah of Tangkak, Johor:

Your loving children cleared the jungles,
opened the roads for us to walk through.
We are walking in their footsteps,
Dear mother, please trust us:
We will work hard, we will be united;
we will show kindness to our fellowmen;
we will never forget the tolerance

which our forefathers taught us.
Though we had some misunderstandings,
we have learned a lesson from the past.
We take a vow not to forget
our duty to you, dear mother,
to rise with unity and peace,
to make the dreams of our leader come true.
Dear mother, watch over us with confidence.
Give us the motivation and courage.
We will always stand firm.
We, the proud Malaysians, salute you.
We will show unity in diversity
for there is one God, one world, one humanity.
Isn't that nice? Till the next letter, take care.
God bless you,