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No objections to improve English

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Representatives of Malay organisations, intellectuals and academicians who met Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today had no objections on the need to improve the standard of English.

Abdullah, who said this, added that they understood the need to master another language besides Bahasa Malaysia and their only concern was how the Government was going to implement the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English in schools next year.

"I took the opportunity to hear their views and will bring their concerns to the Government's attention. There were those who agreed and there were those who did not agree completely," he said after a three-hour meeting with the 36 representatives at the Umno headquarters in Putra World Trade Centre.

Abdullah said what was important was that there was no disagreement that the standard of English had to be improved.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had announced on Thursday that the Government would proceed with introducing English as a medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science in all schools from next year.

Dr Mahathir had stated the Government would not budge from its stand, but would look at all proposals on the method of implementation.

Among those who attended the meeting were representatives from the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (Abim), National Federation of Writers (Gapena), Federation of Malay Students (GPMS), Persatuan Suluh Budiman (Alumini of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris), Malaysian Youth Council, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the Student Representative Councils of Universiti Tenaga Nasional and Universiti Teknologi Mara, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Bumiputera private learning institutions, Yayasan Karyawan and Persatuan Linguistik Malaysia.

During the meeting, some felt the move was timely while others found it too hasty. The representatives also offered proposals, mainly on the method of implementation.

The meeting was called by Abdullah after the Government learnt that associations representing the views of Malays on the teaching of the two subjects in English wanted to be heard.

The meeting began at 8.30am and was scheduled to last for about an hour as Abdullah had another function at 9.30am.

However, according to the representatives, there were many views and concerns expressed and Abdullah had to send Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, who was also present, to represent him at the second function. The meeting ended about noon.

It was learnt that the representatives held an open discussion on the repercussions on Malay students, especially those in the rural areas who were weak in English, Mathematics and Science. They were also concerned about the lack of qualified teachers and textbooks to support the implementation.

GPMS president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim said the representatives debated the issue and gave their views and counter proposals.

They wanted the Government to be cautious and completely certain the system was ready for the implementation of the policy and that using English to teach the two subjects would bring good to the country and future generations.

"There were those who felt that there was no need for haste in implementing the policy.

"We also have those who think that there is no choice but to implement the policy now," he said.

Datuk Mohd Annuar Zaini, who represented the Parent-Teacher Association of Sekolah Menengah Aminuddin Baki, Kampung Pandan, said they understood the importance of English and were prepared to assist the Government in ensuring proper implementation.

Uniten student representative council president Nur Azman Mohd Aminuddin said although there were differences in opinion during the meeting, the overall consensus was that everyone understood the need to improve the standard of English here.

"Everyone was happy that the Deputy Prime Minister took time to listen to our views and assured us that he would share them with the Prime Minister," he said.