

11/10/2002

PM: Teaching Maths, Science in English is for the nation's sake

PETALING JAYA, Thurs. - The Government does not like introducing too many changes to the education system, but the move to teach Mathematics and Science in English has to be made for the country's sake, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said "failure corrections" had to be made whenever the system failed to deliver.

Dr Mahathir said one had to accept the need to revert to English, not completely, but at least for Mathematics and Science which were the key to modern technologies.

"We have no choice but to make changes. This is because we get too much non-educational input which derailed our policies somehow," he said at a dialogue after opening the Learning from Korea seminar.

The event was organised by the National Economic Action Council in association with the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute.

Dr Mahathir also launched the book *Rewriting the Rules: The Malaysian Crisis Management Model* authored by Prof Dr Mahani Zainal Abidin.

A participant asked Dr Mahathir whether Malaysia would have achieved similar progress like Korea if not for the frequent changes to its education system and policies.

Dr Mahathir said the Government should have realised the importance of English when it decided to change the teaching medium to Bahasa Malaysia decades ago.

"But because we are nationalistic, we decided on the switch, hoping that when the English schools were converted into national schools, they would attract multi-racial students," he said.

"Unfortunately, it failed because some people used national schools for the advancement of one race, with the emphasis on making them Malay schools."

As a result, the Prime Minister said most Chinese and Indians did not send their children to national schools. At the same time, those who turned national schools into Malay schools also did not have faith in the system, with many opting to send their children to religious schools.

"This (trend) obviously has to be corrected. That's why we have to come up with the Vision School and the like."

To a question on competitiveness, Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted people to live comfortably, and this had been achieved to some extent.

"But the progress made is still not enough. For example, there are still those who depend on the Government for contracts and other things."

Asked on the role of the media, like exposing wrong-doings, Dr Mahathir replied it should only expose what was actually wrong and not to sensationalise issues to attract readers.

"When they become 'sell-centred', they are no better than the people they criticise. In some countries, the role of the media is to disrupt the society."

On the reasons for Korea's comeback despite having used the International Monetary Fund formula, Dr Mahathir said he believed patriotism played a big role.

He said the Koreans were patriotic and nationalistic in protecting their country.

"Therefore, they work very hard to increase productivity and the women were even willing to donate their jewellery to the Government to help

restore the economy."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said knowledge and information were the key to Korea's competitiveness, besides discipline, diligence, work culture and ethics.

He said it was obvious that many factors had combined well together for Korea to be where it was now.

"Our main task today is to know what these factors are, analyse how they were developed and how they function and finally, what lessons Malaysia can learn.

"But, most important of all, the challenge for Malaysia will be to translate these learning experiences into policies and strategies, to make the Korean experience work for us, too."

Dr Mahathir said Korea and Malaysia were faced with the challenges of finding new sources of growth and enhancing their competitiveness.

He said the tasks had been made more difficult because of the everchanging global environment.

"Challenges such as rapidly changing technology, volatile capital flows, globalisation, barriers to trade, shortage of skilled labour, the digital divide and so forth will determine our future. They must be dealt with as effectively as possible."

The Prime Minister said technological advancement required a high level of knowledge, innovation and creativity, which were related to the level and type of education and learning.

"Korea has succeeded in enhancing technological capability through education and skills training. We in Malaysia feel the same compelling need to remain competitive."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could look at Korea's success in penetrating the international market.

The Prime Minister said against the backdrop of a deepening global slowdown, structural reforms and revitalisation of Asian economies could not be delayed, adding that East Asia must reduce its independence on exports outside the region.