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Yearender-Education

TEACHING OF MATHS, SCIENCE IN ENGLISH A HOT ISSUE THIS YEAR

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KUALA LUMPUR: It would not be an understatement to say that the hottest issue in the education scene this year is the decision of the government to make it compulsory for mathematics and science to be taught in the English language in all schools.

The debate is still simmering since the move was first proposed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last June and despite the decision of the cabinet and the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition on October 22 to go ahead with the implementation next year.

Worried over the deterioration in the command of the English language by students in the country, Dr Mahathir came out with the suggestion to reverse the situation.

He had repeatedly cajoled the youth to master the language that is vital for international trade and commerce, science and technology.

Although he is confident of Bahasa Malaysia, Dr Mahathir stressed that the people would not be able to catch up with the fast-developing world of science and technology if they do not gain a mastery of the English language.

MERITS IN CONSENSUS

The issue was also a direct challenge to the multi-racial coalition when the decision was seen as a move to erode the learning of the mother tongue in the schools by some sectors of society, in particular, the Chinese language.

However, the policy of compromise within the BN prevailed and the Chinese community who are mainly represented by five BN component parties -- MCA, Gerakan, Parti Maju Sabah (SAPP), Parti Rakyat Bersatu Sarawak (SUPP) and Parti Liberal Demokratik (LDP) -- accepted the government decision.

Their stand was announced by all the five Chinese-based party at the meeting of the BN Supreme Council that was chaired by Dr Mahathir on October 22.

As a compromise, all the parties except LDP wanted the policy to be implemented in Chinese primary school but with a different approach.

Dr Mahathir said the four parties had asked for one week to discuss and come out with the best solution while the LDP left it to the cabinet to decide on the issue.

After their discussion, the four Chinese parties applied to the cabinet and obtained its agreement to change the school time-tables, that is, to reduce the number of certain classes to allow for the teaching of maths and science in English.

OBJECTIONS FROM TWO ASSOCIATION

The issue which should have been laid to rest after that compromise, re-surfaced early November when two Chinese associations objected to the policy.

Dong Zong or the Federation of Malaysian Chinese School Boards) and Dong Jiao Zong (the Federation of Malaysian Chinese School Teachers Associations) took the stand that the policy was meant to do away with the use of Mandarin in Chinese schools.

They claimed that the policy is a prelude to the government's main aim of using English as the medium of instruction in Malaysian schools.

Faced with the opposition, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad told them firmly that the government would not bow down to their objections.

The two associations were also heavily rapped by various quarters for not respecting the decision of the majority of the Chinese community.

MATRICULATION PROGRAMMES

Other issues that also took centre-stage was the government decision to open the door of matriculation programmes to non-Bumiputra students to create healthy competition.

The policy dominated the media and other discussion tables of society early this year where a section of the Bumiputra community in general and the Malay society in particular voiced out their concern that the move was not in the interest of the Malays.

In the drawn-out debate and furor, Education Minister Musa who is also a member of the Umno Supreme Council, nearly became a victim when the Senai Umno division wanted to table a vote of no-confidence against him in the Umno general assembly in June.

However, as a result of a compromise and the solid support of other Umno leaders, the head of the Senai Umno division retracted the motion.

PRIVATE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

What also stirred up the education scene was the misunderstanding between Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and MCA president Datuk Seri Ling Liong Sik regarding the intake of Bumiputera students into private institutions of higher learning.

The Umno Youth wanted the intake of Bumiputra students to be fixed at a 10-percent quota since they accounted for less than five percent of the total enrolment of these private universities.

Dr Ling however said the request was unnecessary since the Bumiputra students were not interested in pursuing their further studies in these universities.

The controversy was resolved after they sat down to discuss the issue.

There is some truth in Dr Ling's assertion because the new student intake of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman revealed that only one Bumiputra student had registered to study at the newly-established university.

On the whole, the year was not much different from the previous ones in that educational issues had always received serious attention by the people who place a high value on their children's education.

What it also means is that the government and the people should work together to provide the best education for the younger generations who will inherit the nation. -- Bernama

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