

## **Mahathir wants referendum on PPSMI**

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**by Aidila Razak**

The leader responsible for introducing the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) in national schools today called for a referendum on the matter.

Speaking to reporters, former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the referendum should identify if the have-nots would be left behind due to the policy of teaching the subjects in the national language.

“Perhaps we should do a referendum... to find out whether it is true that the rich people send their children to schools that use English, while the poor have to go to government-provided schools, which teach in Malay.

“You never know. The people who are calling for the teaching of science and mathematics in Malay may be sending their children to English (private) schools,” he said.

He added that while teaching in Malay “is good” it is not so for science as it is a “dynamic” subject.

“It is moving all the time, every day new discoveries are found and you cannot keep up unless you understand the language in which the new knowledge is coming to us,” Mahathir said.

He noted that the fact that the Education Ministry has declared the reversal final also does not deem the referendum as too late as it is a “man-made law”.

“Things can change all the time,” he said.

Earlier today, Mahathir said Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak could still override the decision that Deputy Premier and Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said “is final”.

“We cannot say that the government has made a decision so we cannot question it. It was decided by the government to have PPSMI but somebody questioned it so now we have to change it,” he said, referring to the policy by its Bahasa Malaysia acronym.

Rebutting the argument that PPSMI is sidelining the national language, Mahathir said: “I am as much a nationalist as anyone else. I advocated the use of Malay long before many of these people were born, but

I realise the practicality of (PPSMI) .

“You need to master scientific knowledge to develop this country, I stand by this belief that PPSMI is good for Malaysia,” he said, not minding having lost “many old friends” over it.

‘People should spend their time studying’

The former prime minister also said he still stood by Section 15 of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 which was introduced during his tenure.

“I had reasons to introduce that law. People who are studying, financed by the public, even by the poor, should spend their time studying,” he said.

He added that in his view, those who were interested in national politics “are not among the best students in the country”.

“They should be studying hard to make full use of the money spent on them,” he told reporters at the World Chinese Economic Forum in Serdang.

Chinese dailies had earlier in the day quoted cabinet sources as saying that the Higher Education Ministry has been given the green light to appeal Monday’s decision.

However, Higher Education Minister Khaled Nordin said that the cabinet has opted to let the attorney-general decide on whether to proceed with an appeal.