

English will make our varsities better, says Mahathir

MalaysiaKini.com

Sept 12, 2013

By Billy Boey

Conducting lessons in English, particularly in fields involving science and mathematics, will help public universities climb international university rankings, says former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Speaking to the press after attending the 30th anniversary luncheon of the Japanese Chambers of Trade and Industry Malaysia (Jactim), Mahathir opined the general decline of Malaysia's universities to be a serious matter and should be looked into.

"I think more emphasis on English, especially for the teaching of science and mathematics. That's my stand," the former prime minister said when asked how the standing of Malaysia's public universities could be improved internationally.

On the omission of teaching science and mathematics in English in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, Mahathir said he disagreed with the move.

"I still insist that it is a wrong decision," he said curtly.

On whether he agreed with the blueprint's state goal of making English a must-pass subject in two years, Mahathir replied: "Yes".

'UUCA helps keeps students in school'

The blueprint was revealed on Sept 6, aimed that improving access to education, raising standards, closing achievement gaps, fostering unity amongst students and maximising efficiency.

Asked if the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU) 1971 hindered the academic performance of university students, Mahathir did not provide a direct response but said the law kept students off the streets.

"AUKU is very good for student who spends other people money to demonstrate," said Mahathir, who as education minister amended the law in 1975 - the height of Malaysia's student activism movement - to prevent student participation in politics and trade unions.

Mahathir said that students who spent more time demonstrating than studying had

contributed to a decline in academic performance.

"If they tell us they want to go to university to demonstrate, we won't give them the money.

"But the students said they want to study, but instead they stage demonstration and that cause the drop in their academic results."

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Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/240959>