

Pak Lah: English is important, but ...

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By Adrian Wong

While English is an internationally-accepted language and has great importance in the world, opportunities for education should be given equally to all Malaysians, former prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

Abdullah said this in response to Johor's Sultan Ibrahim Ismail who mooted for the government to impose a single stream education system with English used as the medium of instruction.

However, Abdullah, who is fondly known as Pak Lah, did not specifically say whether he agreed with the sultan's proposal.

"English is important, the whole world is talking about it and accepts it.

"I think here in Malaysia, we have to make sure everyone has the opportunity for education. This is very important.

"You can have education in many languages whether it is Arabic or English, but don't forget our education," he told the media in Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur.

Abdullah was speaking after addressing the 'Second Global Leadership Series: Malaysian Youth and Challenges - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow' forum.

Earlier, he stressed that unity was a fundamental element in nation-building as Malaysia had three major ethnic groups.

He recalled that when he was visiting China as foreign minister, the Chinese leaders had reminded him on the importance of unity in a country like Malaysia.

Thus, without unity, he said, Malaysia would not be able to move forward.

Nothing to say on Umno crisis

The Johor sultan has warned that with the current education system, a '5Malaysia' would emerge, instead of 1Malaysia.

"The Malays go to national schools in which the Chinese feel alienated while the Indians go to the Tamil schools. Where is the unity?" he had posed in an interview published by The Star last Friday.

The ruler also said that Johor should emulate its neighbor Singapore's single stream education system which uses English as the medium of instruction and the republic had

succeeded in fostering unity regardless of race or religion.

At the same event, journalists also took the chance to seek Abdullah's opinion on the current Umno leadership crisis and Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's absence from the 'Nothing 2Hide' forum with NGOs.

However, as soon as Pak Lah heard 'Umno' and 'Najib' mentioned in the same question, he used his palm to cover the recorders of journalists while shaking his head, refusing to entertain any of the questions.

He then walked away, with bodyguards preventing media personnel from going after him.

Najib's no-show at the highly anticipated event with former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad two weeks ago has become the butt of a national joke and has even inspired a Pokemon video game in which the hapless prime minister is lampooned (photo).

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