

Educationists: Najib doesn't deserve credit
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Ngu Ik Ying

The Education Act 1996, introduced by then Education Minister Najib Abdul Razak, made things worse for Chinese education, claimed legal advisors of prominent Chinese education group Dong Zhong (DZ).

Yang Pei Keng (right) said the amendments of the Education Act 1961 in 1996 by Najib resolved one problem by repealing Section 21 (1) (b), but created setbacks in the addition of Section 17 (1).

He opined that Section 17 (1) gave new powers for the education minister to force vernacular schools to use the Malay language as the main medium of instruction.

"The previous act used to only restrict the primary schools but now the new act has enabled the ministry to put restrictions from pre-school education to post-secondary education," he said.

Based on Section 28 of the new act, only state-operated vernacular schools or those given 'special permission' by the education minister, may be exempted from the provisions stipulated in Section 17 (1).

On the Ijok by-election campaign trail yesterday, Najib who is now deputy premier, claimed that he had 'risked losing Malay support' by initiating the repeal of Section 21 (1) (b) which grants the education minister unilateral powers to turn vernacular schools into national schools.

Najib a glory hog

Yang said Najib should not claim credit for repealing the Section 21 (1) (b) because the Chinese community had been campaigning for the law to be removed for decades.

"Finally we managed to reap from what we sowed when some of the provisions under the Act were repealed... But, this has nothing to do with Najib," he added.

Similarly, another DZ legal advisor Ngeow Yin Yee described Section 17 (1) as a new law to 'trap' the Chinese community into accepting the erosion of Chinese education.

Elaborating, he said the new act would mean that all vernacular schools have to seek 'special exemptions' from the education minister in order to maintain its present teaching medium.

"At first we thought it was a good news to have the provision repealed but when the new act came, we realized that the battle getting stiffer," said Ngeow when contacted today.

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