

## **Perkasa not objecting to English school?**

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One, Sivarasa Rasiah admitting his inability to speak Tamil is a handicap. Two is MACC issuing its statement not in Malay but in Chinese on the first anniversary of Teoh Beng Hock's death. And three, the Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) which is seeking an exemption from the policy reversal on Maths and Science.

These are some episodes that recently brushed against the language issue albeit tangentially.

On Saturday, Free Malaysia Today carried a sources story on why the PKR vice-president should give way to another Indian, quoting: "Sivarasa is from an upper-class urban community. He cannot speak fluent Tamil and is not approachable to the rural population."

bershi 1blackmalaysia pc 050509 sivarasa rasiah Since Pakatan Rakyat has been pushing a 'Malaysian First' agenda, Sivarasa could have deflected the criticisms simply by saying something along the ideological line of "Malay is the official language of this country; therefore any Malaysian under 53 years of age has had time enough since 1957 to learn it from birth".

"Now why are you requiring of me fluency in the language of India's Tamil Nadu state?" But Sivarasa (left) is probably too nice to retort with such blunt reasoning.

Pakatan does really operate on the same communal track as Barisan. Notably the anti-Sivarasa faction is melded to the Indian-representing-Indians idea despite PKR's lofty protestations of 'bangsa Malaysia'. And to think Anwar Ibrahim smacked Hindraf as 'racists'.

Like Sivarasa, I shall not belabour the point as I too am sympathetic to the seeming incapacity of the Indian poor to articulate their woes other than in Tamil.

Nonetheless, Pakatan needs to realise that the Malay grassroots are neither stupid nor blind to the disjunction between reality on the ground, and the 'Malaysian First' polemical browbeating DAP and PKR mete out to those who cherish their personal identity as Malay (or Chinese or Indian).

MACC in breach of constitution

"Tapi saya sebut soal bahasa ini kerana memang saya pun hangat sungguh dan ramai wakil-wakil rakyat kita berkelahi habis dah, Ustaz Hadi presiden PAS, seluruh ahli Parlimen PAS, seluruh ahli Parlimen Pakatan termasuk DAP, hok Cina DAP pun minta ajar dalam bahasa sendiri. Hok Melayu Umno pertahankan juga Bahasa Inggeris. ...Tanya saya Bahasa Inggeris penting? Penting. Tetapi Bahasa Melayu ini bahasa rasmi kita, bahasa yang ikut perlembagaan negara kita. Kita tak boleh bertolak ansur atas tu. Ini yang penting." – Anwar Ibrahim at Bukit Selambau (March 7, 2009)

NONETo draw a point from Anwar's speech: Article 152 provides for the use of Malay for "official purposes". MACC is a federal agency and as such, 'Urusan Seri Paduka Baginda' or business it conducts must necessarily be in BM.

For the MACC to have issued its Beng Hock statement solely in Chinese contravenes the above article. In doing so, the commission renders its message of condolence incomprehensible to the widest audience, i.e. the Malay-reading public.

Secondly, one must wonder at the trouble that the MACC went through to have the statement conscientiously drafted in Chinese when they didn't release a Malay version. If you'll look at the organisation chart in its website, there are 17 names listed as top office bearers. All 17 are Malay names; kudos if any polyglot among them helped the MACC chief with his Chinese statement.

Of the 263 officers listed in the MACC online directory, 250 are Malay-Muslim names.

Perhaps a lowly Chinese MACC staffer [they comprise three percent of its officers] thought that Beng Hock's grieving family would be more receptive to a 'Sorry' conveyed in their mother tongue and kindly volunteered to do the translation?

Demand for English school

Article 152(b) of the federal constitution states "nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation".

This clause permits the existence of Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools. The Education Act allows the same.

english medium for maths and science education in chinese school However, English schools as a constitutional provision for Malaysians is a poser if talking about a local community in the federation who have English blood coursing through their veins. Which Malaysian is claiming English as their native tongue?

Next, about PAGE courting Perkasa: If you're wondering why the latter is not defending BM to the hilt, I'll give you a hint - PPSMI/Maths and Science in English was the brainchild of Mahathir Mohamad. Connect the dots.

PPSMI in upper secondary equals English schooling. Modern Maths, Additional Maths, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Additional Science, Applied Science, English, Literature in English, English for Science and Technology can make it altogether ten SPM papers in English. The compulsory BM is only one paper in the above complement of 10+1.

If PAGE is so keen on seeking exemption for participating schools, among them SK Bukit Damansara, SK Seri Hartamas and others in the affluent suburbs, then perhaps the independent Chinese secondary schools (ICSS) might serve as a theoretical model.

English schools could be created on a similar framework. To make a hypothesis, let's particularise SK Bukit Damansara for ease of argument. Now, how to convert it into an English school (the fourth education stream after BM, Chinese and Tamil) for it to continue with PPSMI?

1Malaysia, 4schools

(1) SK Bukit Damansara can be turned into a private school. Parents will just have to pay higher fees [cf. ICSS that don't receive any government aid].

(2) Teachers wishing to remain in SK Bukit Damansara would henceforth be considered private sector employees. They could lose their pension and be stripped of other benefits previously enjoyed as civil servants (or they can opt for transfer).

(3) SK Bukit Damansara will have to buy the land on which the school is sited as well as compensate the government the value of its existing buildings. These funds will go to the Education Ministry to upgrade rural and estate schools and those in the interior. In this way, a lot of poor pupils can be helped; after all, English-speaking parents in PAGE are largely the Sivarasa demographic - "an upper-class urban community".

(4) A Form Five exam conducted in English may not be recognised, just as the UEC exam in Chinese is not. The step forward is for both the English and Chinese qualifications to be recognised.

(5) However, if the English exam, like the UEC, fails to get government recognition, then its certificate

holders should be made ineligible for any government scholarships or matriculation programmes.

Supporters of PPSMI have doggedly trotted out the contention that English is the strongest science and technology language. Few dispute the claim.

By the same token, English is stronger than Korean, than Swedish, than any other language you care to mention. If the rest of the world were to follow the PPSMI rationale, then no country will be teaching their children Maths and Science in their respective national languages.

We have in recent months been plagued by Pakatan politicians and anti-establishment armchair critics who loudly thump their chests for being the Malaysian First-est one of all. If there is a mirror, mirror on the wall, these chest-thumpers should look in it and reflect on the charming 1Malaysian1st-ness of their language orientation.

“When the nation provides for a national language, in our case Malay, then I think in all fairness it is the duty of all to contribute our share to making it a success as was agreed upon and written down in the constitution.” – Tunku Abdul Rahman, in his memoir 'May 13 Before and After'

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