

Muhyiddin: Mahathir accepts the decision

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Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said that former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has accepted the government's decision to scrap his policy of teaching Science and Mathematics in English.

Muhyiddin, who is also the education minister, said he had consulted the former premier before making the crucial decision to revert to the Malay language to teach the two subjects effective 2012.

NONEHe added that he had provided Mahathir with the details of problems encountered in the six-year period when the two subjects were taught in English.

"In the three-hour discussion, my officials and I told him that we were facing problems in implementing his policy... and he accepted our views," he told a press conference in Putrajaya.

According to Muhyiddin, Mahathir was also told of the huge gap between the national schools and the vernacular schools in terms of performance.

He was also informed that most of the teachers themselves were weak in English.

"We have told him (Mahathir) that we were worried we could not achieve our objectives if we were to go on with the policy," he said.

Mahathir implemented the policy just before stepping down in 2003 as a way to strengthen the command of the English language among school children.

Mahathir defended use of English

Muhyiddin however revealed that that Mahathir had defended his brainchild policy by stressing the importance of English in Science and Mathematics (PPSMI) and that the schoolchildren still needed to master both English and Bahasa.

"And we told him that is our aspiration too. We have explained to him that not only are we are not continuing with PPSMI, but we are strengthening the position of English by adding more class time for the subject and increasing the number of English teachers. That is our commitment," he said.

According to him, Mahathir had also come up with suggestions on how schoolchildren could master master English via information computer technology.

"We also accepted his views and we supported his idea to come up with language laboratories," said Muhyiddin, adding that Mahathir has offered to find the right channels for the government to do this.

He also said that Mahathir argued that 200 million people in China are working hard to

master English while this government is reversing the policy.

damansara school open 030107 pupilsBut, Muhyiddin had argued that is because the "Chinese education system is still based in Mandarin".

"And in order to strengthen English like in (China) we are also adding more time to English classes," he said.

Below is the transcript of 30-minute question and answer session between the press and Muhyiddin.

The cabinet decision will come into effect in 2012 will be done in stages... could you explain the reason?

We want to have a soft landing, which means in 2012. Then at the same time we want to allow ourselves to make all the necessary preparations, as I had announced, teachers needed to be recruited, to support the co curriculum and we need time to fulfill the requirements..

As regard with Form 6 and matriculation studies, it remains as it is. At that stage, English is being well taught at that level and a strong demand of Bahasa Malaysia. When you reach that stage, (Form 6), you will have a strong command of both.

That is why we came up with a proposal to strengthen English by adding the number of contact hours in classes.

Was PPSMI (teaching of Science and Mathematics in English) a complete failure?

Well I wouldn't want to say that it is a complete failure. But it has not achieved the desired objectives that it was supposed to achieve.

If it's a failure, the students (would not) go to the (PPSMI) system and acquire the knowledge. It is not a total failure, it's (only) a slow process to even achieve what PPSMI was supposed to achieve.

We can continue with it as an option for example, but it will probably take us 10 or 15 more years before we can have that. Before that time, many things can happen and that might not help the students.

And for education system, it is not good for us.

Do you feel that PPSMI wasn't given enough time to be implemented and was it a quick decision?

There was some proposal that said it should be made earlier, where three years ago, there was some movement argued the policy. But I think if I made the decision back then it would be a bit pre-mature.

damansara school open 030107 new pupilsNow we have gone a so-called complete cycle. What we do now is correct. But can we allow it to go on for another 6 or 5 years? Yes we can, but what will happen to the students, will they improve upon it? We are not too sure.

I am a parent (myself), I would like to see my child or boys and girls under us have strong

command in English. If that is the case, what is the best modus operandi, is it using PPSMI or strengthening English? I think it is the better way if we teach and learn English by getting the right staff and technology.

Strengthening English, does this mean that English in SPM will have to be a compulsory pass subject?

That is something that we have to look at, because I don't think it is the right time to say that but as you know I mooted the idea, and the response of many Malaysians is tremendous which is to make English a compulsory subject to pass.

Six years have gone, do you think the students who were involved in the 6-year cycle, will be irritated with this decision?

They will not be, because they are still humans... You are talking of the improvement of English command, that's what's PPSMI is about.

But as far as we learned the system, in terms of proficiency in English, it's very nominal in Malaysia.

But it took the government six years to realise that it is not effective?

We have realised it earlier, we must understand the system, we realised it's a good idea. At one stage if we start changing it, for one, it will be pre-mature where halfway through, like, today we learn in English, the next instance we learn in Bahasa Malaysia.

NONESo the government is reasonable, where we let you complete the whole thing then we have better future our education system. We must make a correct decision, you cannot make another decision that you might renew after that.

I don't think that's fair. That's why when I first came into the ministry, I didn't immediately change it. I took months to do it, and I came up with options by strengthening English and at the same time upgrading the use of Bahasa Malaysia.

Will the announcement boost BN's support in Manek Urai by-election?

It is not political, I must say that. I did not take this opportunity to take any political mileage and that is not the consideration at all. I would like to stress that this decision has nothing to do with the by-election. What is so important about Manek Urai, that we had to come up with this new policy, although I know BN will win, God willing.

But in regards with this, this is about our children's future and the decision was made after we considered many objectives. It is not political although I am sure the Oppositions will say that this needed to be decided as they had put pressure upon us.

The government has spent billions of ringgit, and now it wants to scrap the policy.

If we were to go on with it, we would have to spend even more money. There is nothing free about the education system but I would not want an ineffective system to go on. Spending money is another issue, but what if we cannot achieve our goals if we continue with this policy?

That is why we needed to come up with a bold decision. And we can utilise whatever we had

spent before. For example, we can still use the existing infrastructure by putting in a new software to improve our system support in terms of ICT.

Whatever it is, in any decision we make, it will still involve spending money.

Will it be okay for the Year One students to choose whether they want to continue in English?

Yes that is one of the options. That is why we encourage them to use bilingual.

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There was a shortage of English teachers during PPSMI policy, how do you curb this now?

We have mentioned that we have more than 13,000 to be recruited in the future. That is why we needed time (by implementing it in 2012).

The teachers that are to be recruited must be fully qualified so I hope with the decision will be endorsed by the cabinet.

How many English teachers are there now in Malaysia?

Now we have 19,433 English teachers nationwide but this figure is different from Maths and Science teachers.

Most of the teachers will be trained, and will also consider taking back the retired teachers who are still healthy and can offer us their service to cushion the lack of manpower. Otherwise, we would have to bring in teachers from overseas.

The decision to allow students from vernacular schools to be taught in their mother tongue was made because the government received pressure from these particular groups?

There is nothing new about their protests. There are more than 600,000 students in these schools and for those who think that the reason behind the decision was made because of their pressure, they probably would not know anything about it.

These people will also accept our decision to allow them to teach these subjects in their own mother tongue after fighting against it all this while.

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