

**... smouldering Dr M hints otherwise**

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Not many moons ago, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad had howled with anger when his handpicked successor demolished his 'crooked bridge' proposal.

This had led the 84-year-old statesman to sink his razor-sharp claws into Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who eventually limped away from the corridors of power after five years.

Mahathir was delighted when his portege Najib Abdul Razak took over the reins in April this year and observers predicted that it would be a continuation of the old order.

But today, Mahathir is growling again.

This is because the new administration has decided to abort his language switch brainchild which he bulldozed through in 2003 amid a cacophony of protests.

According to Mahathir, the government has made a hasty decision.

In a posting on his blog, he revealed that Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin - who also oversees the education portfolio - had met him to provide a briefing on what the government "had already decided to do."

"Although my views were sought, they are not reflected in the decision," he said.

At a press conference in Putrajaya later, the former premier said although there is a lack of qualified teachers to teach the two subjects in English, this can be overcome with time and proper funding.

"The responsibility of the government is to train teachers. It cannot be done overnight.... We must be up to the challenge. I'm confident that our teachers can learn," he said.

Mahathir said that in the past, when the medium of teaching was switched from English to Malay, there was no protest and teachers were soon able to grasp the national language.

"If for now, the teachers speak in a mix of Malay and English (to teach the two subjects), it is (still) acceptable. We should then improve the teachers," he said.

Mahathir said he was sad that the policy has been abolished and it would impair students from seeking scientific knowledge.

On Muhyiddin's claim that data collected showed the policy had failed to meet its objectives, former premier defended the policy and blamed the implementers for the shortcomings.

He also questioned the data used to justify scrapping the policy.

"I think the figures shown are not accurate. They were comparing urban and rural students. Naturally, rural students perform poorer than urban students, not just in science and mathematics but also other subjects," he said.

Mahathir also denied that he was "consulted" on the matter as stated by Muhyiddin.

"That was not a consultation. I was just briefed on what was already decided," he said.

During the briefing, Mahathir said he had suggested for the policy to be implemented at the secondary level, if not primary.

Will this decision see Mahathir sharpening his claws again?

Thumbs-up from BN leaders

Barisan Nasional leaders, on the other hand, were more receptive of the government's decision.

S Samy Vellu, MIC president:

MIC welcomes the decision by the government to revert to the Malay language in the teaching and learning of science and mathematics in national schools and Tamil in Tamil schools. Our support to the decision is based on the consensus by members of the Tamil School Headmasters Council that the two subjects should be taught and learned in the mother tongue (Tamil).

MIC had forwarded the council's recommendations to the Education Ministry and decided to support it because the Tamil school headmasters are well aware of the requirements and needs of their students.

Although there have been improvements among Tamil school students in the two subjects, the council felt that it will be more appropriate for the subjects to be taught and learned in Tamil. We hope that the students' performance in the two subjects will improve further with this decision.

While there maybe mixed feelings towards the government's decision, we are confident that the government had carefully studied the matter before arriving at a decision. We urge all parties, especially parents to accept the decision.

We also urge the Education Ministry to ensure that the standard and command of the English language among students from all schools will not be compromised. As such, new methods and programmes will have to be initiated in all schools, including Tamil schools to ensure that the English language is mastered by all students. English being an international language, must be given priority through the introduction of special classes in schools.

Dr Chua Soi Lek, MCA deputy president:

Of course we welcome the decision, which is what MCA and a lot of Chinese parents hoped for. Parents in urban areas may be disappointed since they want to continue using English in the teaching of maths and science.

With this decision, we hope that the Education Ministry and parents should move forward in ensuring that their children do not neglect Bahasa Melayu and English. All Malaysians should be multilingual. We should not be a monolingual race knowing only one language.

In a highly competitive world, command of languages is an added advantage. English is

today an international language. The Education Ministry should meanwhile improve the teaching infrastructure of English in both primary and secondary schools.

Steps should be taken to overcome the shortage of qualified English and Mandarin teachers. One of the solutions is to employ contract teachers who are trained to teach English and Mandarin.

Since the new policy will be implemented in 2012, I hope that the scrapping of the policy would not affect the students and their studies.

Why wait for three years?

Meanwhile, DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang was not entirely pleased with the latest development. Below are his comments:

If reverting to the use of the Malay language is a good policy, why delay the implementation for three years later.

We have spent six years and RM3 million on a disastrous policy, all we got is deterioration in students' performance in science and mathematics.

What we need is a wise and brave decision that fully considers the future of our next generation.

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