

**Dr M gives BM another slap**  
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**Helen Ang**

Dr M extols the need to master English, it was reported on Monday, where former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged, "Don't let us be re-colonised".

Mahathir was educated in English, jostled with the "colonisation" project in *Malay Dilemma* (written in English) and appears reluctant to move on from his grotesque 1970 treatise.

He's still saying now that Malaysians have to master English so that there will be no "re-colonisation" of the country; so that we're not "invaded" again.

Hypothetically, is there a country today susceptible to neo-colonisation on account of its citizens not having mastered English?

Japanese and Koreans fare poorly in English. Or take China's rise as a powerhouse. Her people have not mastered English either.

If Malaysia were ever to fall under the thumb of putative colonial powers, it certainly won't be because we "no speak English too good".

Think the financial crisis of 1997 and our coming close to the brink that had nothing to do with language medium.

Closet Anglophile Mahathir maintains that only by mastering English can Malaysians acquire knowledge at a faster pace. I've no quarrel with English as a knowledge conduit but I balk at his qualifier "only by".

As to be expected of a devout Machiavellian, Mahathir adroitly shifts the ground on the PPSMI/Math and Science in English issue by contending that "people would not lose their identity by seeking knowledge in English", and tagging his specious statement with the disingenuous "I'm not an Englishman but I speak English".

He's off-mark to imply that those against his PSSMI policy fear English threatening our supposedly insular identity. No one disputes that facility in languages is always advantageous.

But the real bone of contention is that PPSMI never had a solid case going for it in the first place.

Do not forget that Mahathir introduced his policy as a reaction to the problem of unemployed Malay graduates in the early 2000s, and their lack of marketability attributed to poor English, although the degree of this imputed correlation is arguable.

Mahathir's theory then was that teaching Math and Science in English would help students improve their English. Let's not permit his ever so convenient and selective amnesia to sidestep this earlier misplaced rationale!

None of the anti-PPSMI crowd is against English per se. Our platform is the delivery of the national education system. In almost every other country in the world except Singapore (as far as I'm aware), this is carried out in the national language. Singapore, as we all know, is a unique country and Lee Kuan Yew exceptional.

"I don't think the government understands the importance of English as a language of knowledge when they decided to switch from English to Malay," Mahathir doesn't cease complaining. Obviously the education minister's special briefing for him went in one ear and out the other.

The ex-premier then claims "new discoveries are coming out in torrents in English".

Actually, new discoveries are coming alongside rapid scientific and technological expansion, and these can be in Japanese, German or in the flavour of the month, Mandarin (our favourite citation is Taiwan for being the operations base of the Malaysia-born, Chinese-educated pendrive inventor).

But true, English is a working language in science and tech, and my stand is that we should be multilingual.

Dr M is doggedly persistent in defending his rejected PPSMI policy and in the process denigrating the national language, whether inadvertently, or as an unintended consequence. Frankly, I can't think of any other single individual who has given such a slap in the face to the sovereignty of Bahasa Melayu as he has.

Malay is a rich, mature and capable language. At the same time, while proponents of Malay are always respectful of English, the reverse is not true.

How can outsiders look up to a country that has no confidence in her national language? Of course we want the country to forge ahead but not at the expense of negating BM and abandoning national pride without which no nation can be a world beater.

I'm open to the idea that English might allow us a competitive edge but I would balance this economic consideration with promoting 'placeness' and social cohesiveness.

Malaysians are of different ethnicities and religions. To keep this country together, there must be one basic commonality, don't you think? Respect for our lingua franca is it.

What other common denominator is there?

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