

## **Muhyiddin Has Not Inspired Malaysians In His 31 Months As Education Minister**

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**By Lim Kit Siang**

Deputy Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin has not inspired or convinced Malaysians in his 31 months as Education Minister that he is the person to "transform" the proficiency of Malaysian students in English, maths and science for Malaysia to become a global power house in these three subjects.

This point has been further driven home for most Malaysians by his recent maladroit flip-flop over the PPSMI issue.

The greatest disservice Muhyiddin has done to Malaysian education and our international competitiveness was his decision on PPSMI, which was given Cabinet approval on 8th July 2009.

My immediate reaction (9th July 2009) was to describe the Cabinet decision on PPSMI "not a New Deal, as proclaimed by some newspaper headlines, but a Raw Deal leaving Malaysia stranded in the march towards global educational quality, excellence and competitiveness and doing a great disservice to millions of students currently in both the primary and secondary schools".

I had stressed at the time that the Cabinet's PPSMI decision of July 8, 2009 "cannot be the last word on the controversial subject and the whole issue must be re-opened for a broader, more liberal and flexible solution which would have far-reaching consequences not only to nation-building, nature of a society we want to build in Malaysia but also whether Malaysia can compete and stand tall with the rest of the world".

I had right from the beginning in 2002 opposed former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's PPSMI, as it is educationally unsound because educational experience on bilingual education worldwide in the past three decades have shown that using a second language as a medium of instruction from too early stages can impede the development of thinking skills of children resulting in low achievement in mathematics, science and languages – powerful educational arguments against the use of English to teach maths and science from Std. One.

This argument does not apply for children whose home language is the English language or a total immersion education system is adopted with English as medium of instruction.

This is why I had suggested a flexible approach to the PPSMI problem which does not allow a "One Size Fits All" solution, by giving parents the choice to decide on the type of education they want for their children – including having classes or schools using English as medium of instruction for mathematics and science.

The purpose of the ill-conceived PPSMI in 2002 was to raise the standards of English, mathematics and science for Malaysian students which are imperative if Malaysia is not to continue its descent into a backwater, with one country after another overtaking the country in national development and progress.

The reasons prompting the PPSMI in 2002 to transform Malaysia into a global powerhouse in

English, maths and science were right, proper and should be supported but the approach in conceiving and implementing the PPSMI from Std. One was wrong.

In his 31 months as Education Minister, Muhyiddin has failed to come up with a formula which commands public confidence that English, maths and science proficiency of Malaysian students would be upgraded for Malaysia to become a global powerhouse in these three subjects.

In fact, high and vivid in the memory of Malaysians is the admission by Muhyiddin after becoming Education Minister that he did not know that English is not a "must pass" subject for SPM – which shows that neither education nor the decline of English language among students in the past four decades had been very close to his heart in his political career.

Muhyiddin was one of the leading advocates of UMNO for PPSMI in 2002, defending the proposal with the half-baked argument that many countries in the world, including China, Japan, Korea and France were turning to English as it could help them to progress – showing his inability to understand the actual reasons for the opposition to PPSMI in national, Chinese and Tamil primary schools by parents and teachers from all the major races in the country.

It is sad and most deplorable that in his 31 months as Education Minister, Malaysia is today no nearer to finding a solution to "transform" the proficiency of Malaysian students in English, maths and science as to become a global power house in these three subjects to best position Malaysia in the march towards global educational quality, excellence and competitiveness.

## **LIM KIT SIANG**

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