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Dr M: Have a referendum



Wise words: Dr Mahathir giving a speech during the World Chinese Economic Forum at the Palace of the Golden Horses in Seri Kembangan yesterday. - Bernama

'It's never too late to revert to English'

SERI KEMBANGAN: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has suggested that a referendum be held to decide if the teaching of science and mathematics in English (PPSMI) should be continued.

The former prime minister suggested a survey to establish if there was a gap emerging between the rich and poor due to access to English.

"I think we should do a survey to find out if it is true that rich people send their children to schools which use English while the poor attend Government schools which teach in Bahasa Malaysia.

"You never know, the people who are calling for both subjects to be taught in Bahasa Malaysia may be sending their children to English schools," he said yesterday.

"We cannot keep up with the latest in science unless we can understand the language in which the knowledge comes from," he said.

Dr Mahathir firmly stood by his belief that PPSMI was beneficial for all Malaysians although "many old friends" were against him on it.

"I am as much a nationalist as anyone else. I advocated the use of Bahasa Malaysia long before many were born," he said.

Asked if it was too late to revert to English, he said it was never too late.

'These are man-made laws. All kinds of laws

have been changed, such as slavery and death penalty, in some countries."

Meanwhile, Kita president Datuk Zaid Ibrahim welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister's Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's "soft landing" approach towards abolishing PPSMI.

He said it was good as it provided the flexibility that many parents wanted.

"We want the best policy for the children," he said.

Zaid said the decision would also provide time for policymakers to relook the policy at a later time.

He said if poor quality teachers were the issue, it should just be resolved rather than flip-flopping on policy decision.

He refuted the argument that teaching the subjects in English did not support Bahasa Malaysia as the courts had ruled that it did not undermine the national language.

Zaid also said English should be maintained as the language for the two subjects because people could not acquire the best knowledge in science without knowing English.

Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin said the Education Ministry had offered a sensible solution.

"The teaching of the subjects in English should not be forced on the students," he said.

Khairy said he had been in favour of the Bahasa Malaysia being used to teach the subjects.