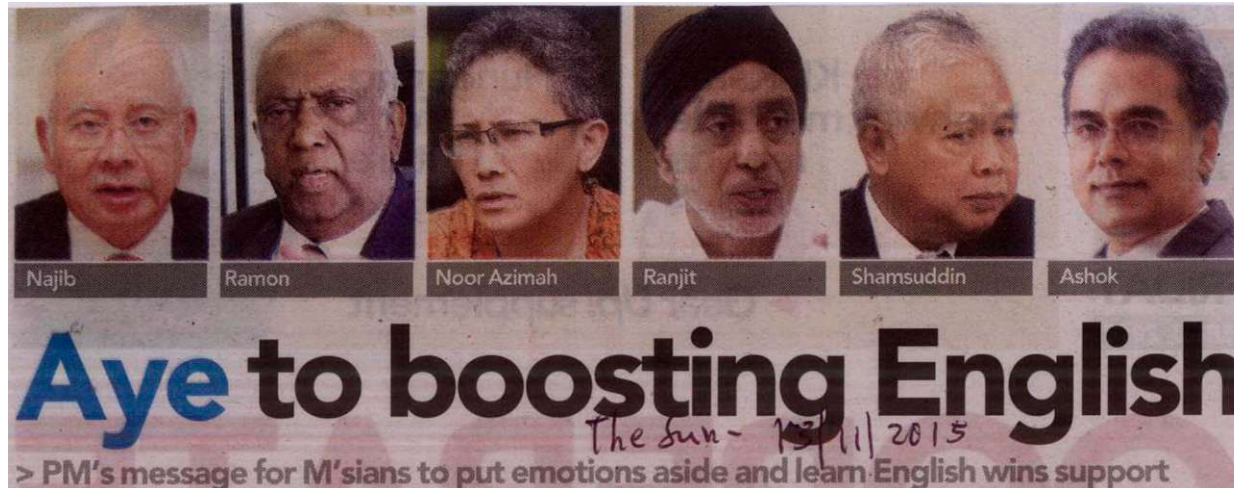


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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak's stance on the importance of English language proficiency has garnered positive responses from various quarters.

"I am glad the prime minister has come out strongly on this matter after so long," said Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, chairman of ASLI's Centre for Public Policy Studies.

"Those who don't learn English will be left behind and will be handicapped in terms of income and progress in life," he said, adding that the lack of English proficiency will only widen income disparity.

He called on the government to make mastery of the language a compulsory

condition for employment.

Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) chairperson Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said Malaysians have great potential, and proficiency in the language could open doors on the international stage. "It is essential for us to not be complacent with only having a strong command of our mother tongues," she said.

Senior corporate fellow of Asia e University, Professor Dr Ranjit Singh Malhi, said the Malaysian education system requires a transformation.

He said the root of the problem lies at the primary school level and stressed the need for competent and qualified teachers.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Ashok Philip said the problem lies in the examinations and the

teaching of the language, which he claimed is "overly simplified".

Malaysian Employees Federation CEO Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said the call to improve mastery of English is a move in the right direction.

Mastery of the language is crucial if the country is to make it big as a trading nation, he said, as English is the international lingua franca. As such, measures need to be put in place to achieve better written and oral command of the language.

On Wednesday, Najib had called on Malaysians to stop being emotional and accept the fact that English proficiency is necessary to take the country further ahead in the international arena.

He went on to say that without English, Malaysians can only be "jaguh kampung" (home-ground champion).