

Stakeholders want to see speedy changes

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PETALING JAYA: Stakeholders want to see changes fast with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad taking on the role of acting Education Minister.

Melaka Action Group for Parents in Education (Magpie) chairman Mak Chee Kin said he has no objection to Dr Mahathir becoming the acting Education Minister.

"So long as he makes the changes he has spoken about," he said, adding that these include a greater emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and making schools more secular.

"I hope he walks the talk and brings back more subjects to be taught in English," he said.

Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE) chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said the Prime Minister has "unfinished business" - an obvious reference to the Teaching and

Learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMI) policy.

PPSMI was introduced in phases, beginning with Year One, Form One and Lower Six students in 2003 during Dr Mahathir's first tenure as prime minister.

Although he would not hold the post for long, Noor Azimah thinks he can bring about at least some form of reform to the nation's education system as he is an influential leader.

"The Education Ministry must first accept the fact that the system needs reform," she said.

"Meaningful reform can only take place if we create the conditions to allow change to flourish, which means having the guts to remove bad apples and re-start with transformational leaders at the ministry, state education departments, district education offices and in schools.

"Changes in policy and curriculum need to be supported and implemented by competent people. Otherwise, it will forever be rhetoric and never a reality," said Noor Azimah.

Mother of two Jennifer Tan hopes that Dr Mahathir's experience will propel the education system to greater heights.

"This will help nurture young developing minds, without hindrance from racial and religious issues," she said.

Benjamin Omar hopes Dr Mahathir will forget communal issues and focus on improving the education system to equip students for the future.

"It's a world of English and coding out there, not fighting on issues that divide us and highlighting divisions," he said.

Father of two Rodney Teoh wonders if Dr Mahathir will be able to see out whatever he wants to imple-

ment in this interim period.

He added that Dr Mahathir needs to quickly appoint the new minister in order to move forward.

Meanwhile, National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general Harry Tan hopes Dr Mahathir does not make "any abrupt changes" to the education system, which is already facing many problems.

Likening the Education Ministry to a "big ship", he said "any changes in her movement must be well planned in advance and with the knowledge of everyone involved, including the sailors in the engine room, personnel onshore and even the pilot and tugboats".

Educationist and former NUTP secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam said it is imperative that Dr Mahathir takes on the portfolio.

He said many "corrections need to be made" and that Dr Mahathir

will have the power to bring about the changes.

Meanwhile, the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) Task Force is waiting to meet Dr Mahathir to present a report.

Its chairman Eddin Khoo said he is waiting to meet the acting Education Minister and present the findings of their study to recognise UEC.

Pakatan in its election manifesto had promised to recognise UEC for independent Chinese secondary schools.

The UEC issue has been dragging on for decades. The task force was originally formed in October 2018.

Besides Khoo, other members of the task force are Dong Zong deputy president Datuk Tan Yew Sing (who is also Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce president) and Muslim Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia president Mohamad Raimi Abdul Rahim.