

Call to use BM welcomed

Implement it here first before moving abroad, say some

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PETALING JAYA: The Prime Minister's call for government officials to speak Bahasa Malaysia at conferences and other engagements abroad as a move to promote the language at the international level has been welcomed.

Others, however, say that this is a regressive move as English is the language of diplomacy.

Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) president Datuk Adnan Mat said the Prime Minister's call is about making a serious effort to reclaim the dignity of the national language and it would elevate Bahasa Malaysia at the international stage.

He hoped that the government would be firm in implementing this proposal and that the use of Bahasa Malaysia in any official government affairs in the country should be done first if it is to be implemented widely abroad.

"The Prime Minister's suggestion should be considered as a directive,

and he should direct all government officials including ministers to uphold Bahasa Malaysia in official ceremonies," he said.

National Writers Association (Pena) president Dr Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad said Bahasa Malaysia must be spoken properly and professional translators must be provided at official events abroad or via Malaysian embassies.

"Within the country, even civil servants, especially politicians and officials in government-linked companies (GLCs), mostly do not care about Bahasa Malaysia," he said.

"This is a symptom of the low self-esteem of a former colonial or comprador society that refuses to be aware that the dignity of the nation needs to be defended."

Assoc Prof Dr Azman Awang Pawi from Department of Socio-culture, Academy of Malay Studies, Universiti Malaya, said the government must focus on empowering the national language within the country first to show the government's commitment towards empowering the language.

However, former international

trade and industries minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz described the Prime Minister's call as "regressive" and said the national language would not be lost even if Malaysians are fluent in universal languages such as English.

"Our own language will not be lost although we are fluent in a universal language such as English because our young people will be able to achieve excellence at the regional and global level by being able to master various knowledge and expertise through mastering universal languages," she said when contacted.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said that government officials speaking at conferences and other engagements abroad must use Bahasa Malaysia.

He said that if the host country's representatives use English, the Malaysian officials could choose to respond in either Bahasa Malaysia or English but if the host country representatives speak in their national language, then the response should be in Bahasa Malaysia.

Former Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) chairman Tan Sri Johan Jaaffar said linguistic nationalism has no place in diplomacy and that he is more concerned about the deteriorating standard of spoken and written Bahasa Malaysia being used in the country.

He said the new recommendation of using Bahasa Malaysia at government functions abroad should not be used to make concessions for the poor command of English by high-ranking Malaysian officials such as diplomats.

"We will be at a loss when our diplomats are not able to articulate our positions on critical issues if they don't have a good command of English or any other languages."

Academician Dr Ranjit Singh Malhi said the advice reflects a drastic decline in the mastery of the English language not just among government officials but also among academics and educators.

"Instead of tackling this matter, we are doing it the wrong way by justifying that it is okay to use Bahasa Malaysia when speaking at official events overseas," he said.