

'SPEED UP ENGLISH PLAN ROLL-OUT'

Policy approved in 2023 should have been implemented in 2024, not 2028, says PM

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has told the Education Ministry to speed up efforts to strengthen English proficiency among students.

He said the full implementation of the policy should not have to wait till 2028, as the cabinet had agreed to it in 2023.

He acknowledged the complexities in implementing policies but warned that using the "old system" would cause Malaysia to lag behind other countries.

"If we follow the usual projections, the timeline would look like this: our decision in 2023,

would be planned in 2024, finalised in 2025. Trials would take place in 2026 and 2027, and only by early 2028 would we start the implementation.

"We cannot afford to have such a plan — that is the old approach. Instead, if we make a decision in 2023, its launch and implementation must take place in 2024. By 2025, it should be rolled out at the national level," he said in his speech at the Finance Ministry's monthly assembly.

Anwar said all of the government's reforms must be expedited to prevent Malaysia from falling behind other nations.

He said the success of the reforms could only be measured by their impact on the people.

"I recognise that, over the past year or two, efforts have indeed

been intensified, and all ministry leaders have carried out their duties to the best of their ability.

"However, we must remember that the ultimate measure is how the majority of the people benefit from the reforms we are discussing," he added.

In 2023, Anwar had called for an increase in English proficiency among school students starting in 2024, but stressed that the government would not compromise on Bahasa Malaysia as the national language.

In response, the Education Ministry introduced the English Language Education Empowerment Plan (3PBI) to strengthen oral communication and advanced reading skills of students.

Deputy director-general of Education (school operations sector) Zainal Abas had said 3PBI would also improve English language teachers through professional development and skill training courses.

Anwar's call was met with approval from experts.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Centre of Education and Diversity senior lecturer Dr Anuar Ahmad said the government must reform the implementation of its English proficiency policy to address the vast gap between urban and rural students.

He said English proficiency varied significantly across different regions, with students in urban areas having greater exposure to the language compared with their rural counterparts.

"English is not a critical issue in major cities as many students speak the language at home. However, for children in rural areas and remote villages, English is rarely used in daily life, making it much harder for them to adapt when they start school," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Annuar said a uniform syllabus for all schools could not cater to the needs of students from differ-

ent backgrounds.

"The same curriculum is used nationwide, but students in urban areas have a head start, while those in rural communities struggle with basic vocabulary. We need a more localised and dynamic approach to address this gap."

The National Union of the Teaching Profession said the government must overhaul the English syllabus to focus on communication skills, vocabulary, and national values.

NUTP secretary-general Fouzi Singon said the current syllabus leaned more towards grammar proficiency.

"If we look at the current textbooks, all the values taught are imported from the West — everything from Cambridge is adopted 100 per cent without incorporating Malaysian values."

He also urged education experts to explore methods of familiarising primary school pupils with English from an early age.