

## **Time not right to use BM for science and technology**

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**FMT LETTER: From Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim, via e-mail**

We refer to, 'Focus on mastery of English first, says Puad' (NST Feb 28), and thank the deputy education minister for extending the grace period for students who want PPSMI "to continue to do so until it ends in 2026." As we know it, PPSMI has been allowed to continue only until 2021.

We who were present at the roundtable discussion on Malay Civilisation Post-Modernism held at the Perdana Leadership Foundation and chaired by former Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad were pleasantly surprised by Puad's statement in NST. What Puad said was not tabled at the roundtable discussion; it was his answer to the media's private Q&A session.

Puad's reported announcement was in response to Mahathir, who spoke at great length about the importance of developing knowledgeable Malays in the presence of 200 Malay nationalists. Mahathir was adamant that in order to advance, the Malays must have access to the latest and state of the art scientific knowledge, which is in English. This was the primary reason that PPSMI was conceived and introduced in schools, now running into its 10th year, so Malaysia can keep pace and not be left behind in terms of development.

The former prime minister had made a personal and impassioned plea to the deputy education minister, in the presence of this distinguished group of learned men, to reconsider the decision to abolish PPSMI. But evidently, it fell on deaf ears, as if the role the Mahathir played in modernising Malaysia needs no more to be remembered.

He continued to say that we have to be pragmatic and that it was not something he had imagined but what had been proven historically. He recalled how early Muslim scholars in Spain had interpreted 'reading' and the acquisition of knowledge widely, translating the works of the Greek scholars, analysed, studied and accumulated this body of knowledge.

However, towards the end of this era, the Muslim attitude towards knowledge acquisition and intellectual development changed when new rulers gained control of and frowned upon the study of subjects other than religion. The Christian Europeans, seeing the great achievements of the Arabs in Spain, gained access to the knowledge in the great libraries of Al-Andalus, by mastering Arabic then translating Arabic texts into Latin.

The rejection of non-religious learning marked a turning point in the history of both civilizations. For the Muslims it was the beginning of its decline. For the Europeans, the knowledge gained from studying the Arabic translations of the works of the Greeks and the Muslim scholars contributed much to the Renaissance. Over time, the Europeans gained world dominance.

He then stressed that we are unable to translate all scientific knowledge into Bahasa Malaysia as we lacked the capability, capacity and expertise to do so, thus learning the new sciences which is evolving daily, in English, was the best approach. Until we have acquired and mastered the knowledge, as the Muslim scholars did during

the Islamic civilisation, can we only think about Bahasa Malaysia ever being the lingua franca for science and technology. The time has not yet come.

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