

Strengthen vernacular schools to tap language asset, says DAP MP
The Malaysian Insider
February 18 , 2012
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 18 — Malaysia must put national and vernacular schools on an equal footing to take advantage of the country's racial diversity even as the world's economic locus shifts to China and India, a DAP lawmaker said today.

Liew wants Malaysians to 'master three, four languages'. — File pic
Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong said there was need for a new framework that did away with the "outdated" idea that Malaysians should only speak one language and also recognised Chinese and Indian languages as an "economic imperative".

"Malaysia is sitting on a language gold mine... This is our national asset. The world is amazed by Malaysians and yet we're not treating this language diversity as an asset.

"It is time for us to realise that each of us can master more than one language... We must move on and (realise) that 2012 is different from the 1960s," he said during a session at the "Malaysian Chinese at the Political Crossroads" conference here.

Liew, who is also the DAP's international secretary, told reporters later Malaysia must move away from treating schools as political tools to build unity towards promoting education in more than one language.

"What we have should be included as a full-scale partner in the system. There's no point discriminating," he said.

"Since you already have the framework, go whole hog and then make them an asset instead of seeing them as a problem."

However, Liew stressed that this did not mean Malay would lose its place as the national language, as learning how to communicate in other languages would not diminish the status of Bahasa Malaysia.

Malaysia should emulate Switzerland where citizens have to master three languages, he said, noting that Indonesia was already thinking of taking of steps to improve its mastery of other languages.

"I want Malaysians to master three, four languages. It's not a zero-sum game. We should move forward," he said.