

Mahathir: PPSMI proponents 'true nationalists'
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By Yow Hong Chieh

TANJUNG MALIM, Sept 21 — Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has thrown his weight behind the pro-English lobby, calling them "true nationalists" for wanting to ensure Malaysia kept abreast with the latest scientific findings.

Dr Mahathir, who instituted the teaching of science and mathematics in English (PPSMI), pointed out that most papers on new discoveries made in the two fields were in English and warned Malaysians they risked becoming a backward people if they did not know "the world's lingua franca".

"It's not a question of lacking nationalism," he said of PPSMI supporters after his executive talk at Sultan Idris Education University here today.

"In fact, it is true nationalists who want their people to possess more knowledge, not just be able to speak in Malay."

The trained medical doctor said there were new findings in science and mathematics almost every day, unlike other subjects, and stressed that mastery of English would allow Malaysians to catch up on the latest developments without waiting for translations.

Dr Mahathir added that he too loved the Malay language — pointing out that he had written about the importance of Malay in 1948 "before these (anti-PPSMI) people were born" — but stressed that English was a must for Malaysia to reach new heights.

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Dr Mahathir added that he too loved the Malay language — pointing out that he had written about the importance of Malay in 1948 "before these (anti-PPSMI) people were born" — but was adamant that English was a must for Malaysia to reach new heights.

Pro-English lobby group Parent Action Group for Education (Page) has been locked in a two-year battle with the Najib administration to get PPSMI, abolished in 2009, back in schools.

Page has urged that schools be allowed to teach science and mathematics in English, citing widespread support from parents for the option.

PPSMI was first introduced in 2003 but the Education Ministry has decided to put an end to it by 2012 after consulting teachers and parents around the country.

In the uproar that ensued, Putrajaya introduced MBMMBI, which will see the teaching of Mathematics and Science revert to Bahasa Malaysia from 2012 with more contact hours for English in order to improve students' skills in the language.

In May, The Malaysian Insider reported that the Najib administration had decided not to switch back to PPSMI because several Cabinet ministers felt any change would be seen as another embarrassing flip-flop.

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