

Let's use **both** English and BM

theSun SAYS

IMAGINE being able to use both hands with equal dexterity and not be reliant on just one hand to write, draw, shoot, or even play badminton. Would that not be a great advantage compared to being either just right- or left-handed?

And just as it would be better to be ambidextrous than monodextrous, it would surely be advantageous if our people can all be at least bilingual, if not multilingual?

As such, the recent decision by Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem to make English a second official language for the state should not just be lauded but also emulated.

Encouraging the people to master English as well as Bahasa Malaysia through this decision speaks volumes of Adenan's political wisdom, far-sightedness, great statesmanship and leadership compared to some obviously parochial and hypocritical politicians.

Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak recently admitted that Malaysian graduates often lost out in the job market as they lacked confidence due to their poor command of English.

Despite scoring in their examinations, he said Malaysian graduates still struggle to secure jobs because they fail to persuade employers that they possess the sought-after qualities.

Recently, 1,000 medical graduates had to quit their ambitions to become doctors because of poor English. Although they had completed their two-year housemanship stints in public hospitals, their English proficiency was simply inadequate to enable them to function in the medical field.

Among detractors of Adenan's decision were Social and Cultural Affairs Adviser to the Government Tan Sri Rais Yatim and Perkasa youth chief Irwan Fahmi Ideris.

Rais said the move could sow seeds of discord among the people while Irwan said there was no benefit in using English and that

Adenan was betraying the country's Constitution by adopting English as an official language.

But obviously, Adenan could plainly see that people who can master more than one language, especially English which is the lingua franca of not just the United Kingdom but the world at large, will have an advantage over those who only speak Bahasa Malaysia.

In his own words, adopting English as an official language of the state administration was a matter of "being realistic and accepting the fact that it is used globally".

"We are not living on the moon ... It (English) is not only the language of the Anglo-Saxons. It is the language of the world ... not Bahasa Malaysia. Even Mongolia wants to learn English," he said.

"We are a trading nation. We buy and sell with the Japanese, the Koreans, the Americans and so on ... I don't suppose all Americans and Japanese can speak Malay. It's very unrealistic, so we have to be practical," he said, highlighting that English is also the language of trade and commerce as well as learning, science and technology.

Adenan said Malaysians must think global and accept the concept of a borderless world where competition is getting stiffer and mastery of the English language is a must to progress.

He stressed that the state administration would continue to use Bahasa Malaysia while raising the level of both languages, and that official correspondence of the government can now be in either Bahasa Malaysia or English.

Another bold and far-sighted move by Adenan was to recognise the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), which is recognised by many

countries but not the Malaysian government.

Defending his decision, Adenan said he did not know why the federal government has refused to recognise the UEC.

"Frankly, I am baffled. Malaysia is perhaps the only country that does not recognise the UEC," he said, cautioning that if Malaysia continues to not recognise the certificate, other countries that do will pinch away holders of the qualification.

He said on one hand the government invites foreign students to study in Malaysia, to turn the country into an international education hub and centre of excellence.

"But they do not allow UEC holders to enter local universities. It's stupid not to allow them to do so," he was quoted as saying.

Many politicians know that Adenan's decisions were definitely ones in the right direction, but most probably do not have the courage to openly support or implement them.

Among the loudest voices of support for the wider use of English is that of the Sultan of Johor, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, who has repeatedly called for a revival of English-medium schools in Malaysia, akin to the system in Singapore.

Sultan Ibrahim has said that Malaysia can learn from the way Singapore has forged national unity via its education system, which he pointed out has not only helped develop the nation but also brought its people together regardless of race and religion.

Former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has also echoed this call, saying that English proficiency in Science and Mathematics is vital to ensure Malaysia is not left behind in the latest scientific fields.

"Nowadays, English has become an important international language and most of the knowledge comes to us in English," he had said, stressing that without English proficiency, Malaysia will fail to develop rapidly, especially in economic terms.

It is time for other leaders to take the cue from forward-thinking leaders like Adenan and do what is truly needed for the betterment of our nation.

It is time everyone accepts that mastering English is no longer an option but a necessity, if we are to move with and stand among progressive nations of the world.

We salute Adenan for his wisdom, far-sightedness, visionary leadership and for having the courage to do what is good and right for the people of Sarawak.

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- Tan Sri Adenan Satem

