NEW STRAITS TIMES

# Multilingual education is the way forward for Malaysia

March 28, 2024 @ 12:10am



*NSTP FILE PIC, FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSE ONLY.*

**LETTERS:** The New Straits Times reported on March 22 that "No additional funds allocated for DLP (Dual Language Programme), says Education Ministry".

Parents in favour of the DLP hope that this lack of more funding will not prevent the Education Ministry from opening more DLP schools and classes, allowing more students to enrol in the programme.

We understand that some parents have failed to get their children into DLP due to a situation of demand exceeding supply.

In 2023, the Education Ministry indicated that for Sabah and the peninsula, only 8.4 per cent of primary schools offered DLP classes, which is alarming. Nationwide, only 7.44 per cent of primary school pupils and 12.17 per cent of secondary school students have access to the DLP.

There is, therefore, ample room for expansion despite running the programme since 2016.

Vernacular schools have been deemed constitutional, and no more legal challenges will be entertained by the courts.

The education minister, too, has been firm in supporting the existence and role of vernacular schools in the education system. Malay parents are also more accepting of learning Mandarin.

We foresee that if parents are unable to enrol their children into DLP, they may be forced to consider Chinese schools for Mandarin.

There are other options, depending on affordability, such as homeschooling, private and international schools or even Sekolah Anak Malaysia (our first home-grown digital school), which guarantees DLP.

Malaysia is a beneficiary of the United States-China battle for global technology supremacy. We have become an alternative to China as an investment destination.

We want to be at the front-end of the US$520 billion global chip industry, as US, China, South Korea, Japan, Switzerland, Britain and German companies set up shop here.

Penang itself has attracted RM60.1 billion in foreign direct investments (FDIs) in 2023, surpassing the combined total between 2013 and 2020. With the price of land steadily rising, businesses are spilling over to the more cost-effective Kedah and Perak.

The prime minister describes developing the semiconductor industry into higher-value manufacturing as a "critical goal, a very critical moment, a departure from history".

He, however, laments that our greatest vulnerability is a severe talent shortage.

We require 50,000 engineers, but our universities produce 5,000 yearly. We also lack specialised expertise to be able to move up to the front end of the supply chain.

The education minister proclaims that she is the guardian of Bahasa Melayu (BM) and mother tongues.

If the Education Ministry does not plan to open any more DLP schools and classes, then be prepared to expand Chinese school branches in order to scale up competent engineers.

She now needs to strike a fine balance between BM, the English language and Mandarin. If not, Vietnam and India are poised to wrest the investment opportunities from us.

**DATIN NOOR AZIMAH ABDUL RAHIM**

Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE)

Kuala Lumpur

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**The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times**