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Multilingualism the way to economic success

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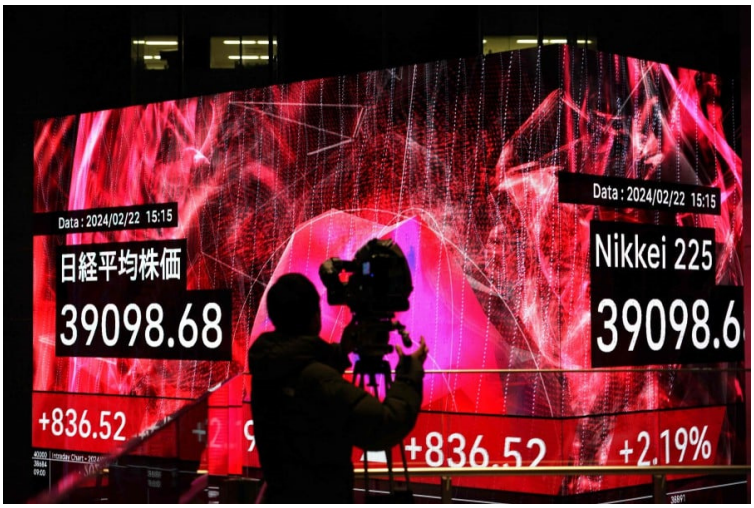


Image show an electronic board displaying the closing numbers of Nikkei index of the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo on February 22, 2024. AFP PIC

LETTERS: In the global landscape dominated by the English language, a prevailing myth suggests that economic success is intricately tied to proficiency in English.

There are shining examples of nations that have achieved remarkable economic prosperity without relying heavily on English.

Take Japan, for instance. Following its post-war reconstruction, Japan emerged as an economic powerhouse without making English a cornerstone of its success.

It focused on technological innovation, industrial prowess and strategic economic policies to become one of the world's leading economies.

Similarly, Germany stands as a beacon of economic strength, built on engineering excellence, manufacturing prowess, and a strong emphasis on vocational education.

German companies like BMW, Volkswagen, and Siemens have attained global prominence without abandoning their native language.

South Korea is another example. Conglomerates such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG have become household names worldwide, driving the nation's economic success.

While English is widely taught and used, it is not the sole determinant of economic achievements.

Perhaps the correlation between economic achievement and proficiency in English can be better illustrated by examining the 2021 English Proficiency Index conducted by Education First.

Here, Malaysia stood out, ranked among the top 10 countries in Asia for English proficiency, in third position after Singapore and the Philippines. South Korea, Hong Kong, China, and Japan, were ranked lower than Malaysia, alongside Indonesia, in 15th spot.

These examples underscore the fallacy of equating English proficiency with economic prosperity.

In our case, we have designated Bahasa Malaysia as the national language as a testament to preserving its rich cultural heritage and fostering a sense of national identity among citizens, bridging the gap between various ethnic groups and promoting social cohesion.

Malaysia prioritizes the preservation and promotion of Bahasa Malaysia within official contexts.

This not only honours the country's historical roots but also ensures Malaysians fully participate in national affairs and express themselves authentically in their national language.

Hence, the imperative for the government is to strike a harmonious equilibrium between the utilisation of Bahasa Malaysia and English languages, thus reserving its national identity while ensuring competitiveness on the global stage.

Within the realm of civil service, achieving this objective can be facilitated through a systematic approach based on the 'inner, outer and expanding' circle model of World English proposed by eminent Indian linguist, Braj Kachru.

The inner circle encompasses sectors where English is integral, such as business, trade, and diplomacy. The outer circle comprises sectors where English serves as a secondary language or complementary to primary functions such as education, health, science and technology.

Lastly, the expanding circle pertains to sectors with minimal English language requirements, such as land and rural administration, where officers primarily interact with local communities daily.

We should, therefore, emphasise linguistic diversity. Multilingualism fosters cultural exchange, facilitates diplomatic relations and enhances cross-border cooperation.

By embracing the national language while capitalising on the English language prospects, we can chart our course to prosperity on our own terms. Remember that economic success knows no linguistic boundaries.

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