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Bahasa needs a push, too

NOW that the dust has finally settled on the debate on whether English or Bahasa Malaysia should be used in the teaching of Mathematics and Science, the task now is to ensure the decision to raise the prestige of Bahasa Malaysia and strengthen the use of the English language is carried out effectively.

For the moment, I would like to put forth the various shortcomings in the use of Bahasa Malaysia as a language of distinction and suggest measures to overcome them.

The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) has done an excellent job in translating scientific and mathematics terms from English to Bahasa Malaysia. But these corpora are not easily available and are often out of stock in various bookshops that come under the DBP's panel. I suggest that these corpora from English to Bahasa Malaysia and vice versa be made available to Malaysians via the Internet without any charge. These corpora should also be expanded and improved.

The DBP and the Malaysian National Institute of Translation should be given a greater role in translating scientific and mathematics books into Bahasa Malaysia. A list of the translated books and scientific books in Bahasa Malaysia should be made available on their websites, and also where to purchase them. Public universities should play similar roles.

A national award akin to the literary awards or Nobel Prize should be given to outstanding scientists who produce their research, particularly in Bahasa Malaysia. This is to prove that scientific research of international standard can be done in Bahasa Malaysia.

A Bahasa Malaysia language officer or *Munsyi Dewan* (Language Sage) should be placed in all government ministries and agencies so as to ensure that any texts, messages, circulars and announcements in Bahasa Malaysia coming from these places do not contain grammatical errors.

Some public and private signboards in Bahasa Malaysia are also poorly written. There is also a tendency in Malay films and television series to use street language or slang, which should be curbed.

National leaders and politicians should be at the forefront of upholding and promoting the dignity of Bahasa Malaysia at national and international levels.

A recent press conference by US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev was done in both English and Russian. It is fitting that our leaders should speak in Bahasa Malaysia at national and international press conferences and events.

The backdrops of some of the national and international events are also not done in proper Bahasa Malaysia, or the use of Bahasa Malaysia is not given prominence. Some of these events are also not conducted in Bahasa Malaysia. The speakers prefer to speak in languages other than Bahasa

Malaysia.

In schools, there is a serious shortage of Bahasa Malaysia teachers. It seems that anyone who can speak Malay can be a Bahasa Malaysia teacher. On the contrary, they are not trained Bahasa Malaysia teachers and have less comprehensive knowledge of the language. In our zest to improve the usage of English among Malaysians, the proper training and life-long career of Bahasa Malaysia teachers has been neglected. Coupled with this, the high illiteracy rate among poor Malaysians and the poor command of the language, even among Malay students, needs to be addressed.

As RM5 billion will be spent on improving the teaching and learning of English, an equivalent amount or even more is needed to enhance the learning and teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and safeguarding the purity of the language.

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