

said after a get-together with

against the Constitution.

The government, through the

these incidents."

year.

'Teachers should be more judicious'

KUALA LUMPUR: Subjects related to national identity, such as *Negaraku*, should be handled with care to avoid stoking discontent among the public.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Ethnic Studies principal fellow Datuk Dr Teo Kok Seong said the issue of a video showing *Negaraku* being sung in Mandarin by schoolchildren would not have occurred had teachers exercised sensitivity.

He said while the lyrics of the national anthem had been made available in vernacular schools' textbooks since 2014, it did not give the green light for *Negaraku* to be sung in any other language apart from Bahasa Melayu.

Teachers, he said, should be more judicious when dealing with the issue of national symbols in the classroom.

"If the translation of the song exists for teaching and learning, it doesn't mean that it can be sung in any other language than Bahasa Melayu.

"This is also stated in the National Anthem Act of 1968," he

told the *New Straits Times*.

On Friday, a clip of pupils singing *Negaraku* in Mandarin in a vernacular school in Negri Sembilan went viral, drawing criticism from people.

A day later, three clips of *Negaraku* being sung in Arabic surfaced.

The *New Sunday Times* had reported that the lyrics of *Negaraku* had been translated into Mandarin and Tamil for Year 5 History textbooks since 2014.

Education director-general Datuk Dr Amin Senin had, on Saturday, said teachers should exercise their judgment with regard to the use of national symbols and the national anthem in the classroom.

"We would like to remind teachers to exercise their wisdom so that they are not misunderstood by any party."

He had clarified that the translation of the *Negaraku* lyrics in the Chinese and Tamil History textbooks was to enable pupils of vernacular schools to understand the meaning of the national anthem.

Legal expert Lim Wei Jiet said the law stated that *Negaraku* should be sung only in Bahasa Melayu.

This, he said, was evident in the National Anthem Act 1968, which defined the "national anthem" as the composition consisting of words and music specified in the Schedule of the Act, which was written in Bahasa Melayu.

"Therefore, in official ceremonial functions as specified in Sections 3 to 6 of the act, the *Negaraku* must be sung in the Malay language."

He said the teaching of *Negaraku* in classrooms was not listed as one of the official ceremonial functions in Sections 3 to 6, covering occasions for the anthem to be sung and the versions full or abridged.

"However, Section 7 of the law stipulates that on all occasions when the national anthem is sung, the full or royal version shall be recited.

"The full or royal version in the schedule is in the Malay language.

"Hence, it is arguable that, for



Datuk Dr Teo Kok Seong



Lim Wei Jiet

all occasions (including teaching of *Negaraku* in classrooms), the national anthem must be sung in the Malay language."

He said Section 8(3) of the act stated that those who knowingly showed disrespect to the national anthem in any public place shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding RM100 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month.

"Section 8(4) of the act states that 'any act or omission which would tend to lower the prestige of the National Anthem in the eyes of the public'.

"It is debatable whether singing *Negaraku* in another language

besides the Malay language is tantamount to 'lowering the prestige of the National Anthem in the eyes of the public'.

"But we must also look at Article 152(1)(a) of the Federal Constitution, which states that "no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language."

"It is hence arguable that teaching *Negaraku* in Arabic or Mandarin in classrooms for understanding the lyrics is permissible or protected under Article 152(1)(a) of the Federal Constitution."