

# We'll be left far behind

IN "English not only language of science" (*The Star*, Feb 22), Prof Datuk Ir Wan Ramli Wan Daud, President of UKM's Fuel Cell Institute, said, "It is more about being able to create new scientific knowledge from a deeper understanding of science and mathematics which can only be achieved by learning it in the mother tongue." I very much doubt the accuracy of this claim.

Having studied mostly in English, he is obviously better off than most scientists in this country as he is bilingual and has access to science books in both Malay and English.

Prof Wan Ramli gave some examples of outstanding students whom he taught who have made a name for themselves in international academic circles as the world's best scientists. But how many of them out of the hundreds or the thousands that he taught and trained achieved such accolades - 2%, 3%, 4% or 5%?

Thousands more, he said, a "few generations," did not make that grade. Compare that to the proportion of students who were taught in English worldwide who made that grade.

Early this millennium, I was appointed a member of a team tasked to set up a local private university to offer arts, science and engineering courses, and we had some well-known universities from the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand as our twinning partners.

Part of the studies were to be undertaken here and the remain-

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der at our partners' campuses.

Among the Higher Education Ministry's conditions was the need for us to have local academic staff, as we were not allowed to have more than a certain number of foreign academic staff seconded from our twinning partners' universities.

We interviewed many local qualified and experienced masters and doctorate holders and despite the impressive credentials of many of the local applicants, mostly non-Malay candidates were appointed. The Malays weren't hired simply because their command of English wasn't good enough. Less than 10% of the Malays were taken.

Since the degrees were all awarded by the respective foreign twinning universities, we had to make sure that the standard of English of all our graduates was accepted internationally.

A local Bahasa Malaysia-speaking scientist who has a PhD in chemistry, for example, may not be able to communicate effectively with a scientist from a for-

ign country with a similar or an equivalent qualification, who uses English.

The Dual Language Programme (DLP) is not like the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English (PPSMD).

DLP is supposed to make our students understand English so that they will achieve a standard that is acceptable at both the local and the international level. Many are also suggesting that subjects like history and literature be taught in English.

If university dons like Prof Wan Ramli insist on using the mother tongue to teach mathematics and science without supplementing it with a programme for our students to learn English, how do they expect our graduates to understand scientific journals written in English?

If our graduates only work in the country and do not have to deal with people overseas at all, that's fine but as a country, we will always be left far behind countries whose graduates use English and have access to new scientific discoveries and technology.

It can be argued that science books in English can be translated into Bahasa Malaysia but how many books can be translated in a year, compared to the number of new science books published during the same period?

Transfer of technology cannot be applied for the very same reason and as a country, because of that, we can never achieve first world status. Even after building

or constructing new infrastructure, the operations and maintenance work will mostly have to be undertaken by expatriates.

Our own people will be delegated to subsidiary work and the less important non-strategic duties and responsibilities, and we will always be dependent on foreigners.

I am a former soldier who saw real action. The military made it a point that we had soldiers (and officers) who could speak the enemy's language or languages, and know and understand all the codes and the sign language used by them in order to gain an advantage over them. That's how crucial and important knowing more than just our own language is.

No concerned Malaysians who care for the well-being of the country should object to the implementation of DLP in national schools.

With the signing of the TPPA, please realise that our country wants to be an important global player, not just in trade but in many other areas, and education is definitely one of them. Without a good grasp of the English language, besides knowing the national language, we may not get the quality (of education) that we are looking for and without it, I and, I believe, many other concerned Malaysians, do not think that our country can get to where we want to be.

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