

'Incorrect to assume Malay children BM proficient upon entering Year One'

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KOTA KINABALU: The assumption that Malay children are already proficient in Bahasa Melayu (BM) upon entering Year One is incorrect, says Datuk A. Kadir Jasin.

Describing BM as the most important subject in school, the Prime Minister's media adviser said teaching proper use of the language should be a priority in schools as even Malay children, especially those from urban or semi-urban areas, may not be proficient in their mother tongue.

"I am proud to say that Malay children nowadays are fluent in English. But while their command of English is strong, their BM is weak.

"There are some Malays who speak English at home. Even those who speak BM in their daily lives are not using the language the way it is taught in school," he said at a dialogue session in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) on Monday (Dec 3).

Kadir explained that language proficiency, be it in BM or English, was important.

"Our mistake today is that we neglect language proficiency. So that leads to a society that is neither strong in BM nor English, and this is hard to change by the time students enter university.

"We should not stifle the use of any languages in schools, but we need to prioritise mastering the use of proper BM, not 'Bahasa Melayu membawang' (gossip).

"I don't entertain the use of such language. Universities should also be more 'dictatorial' in this regard, and ban its use," he added, saying that BM should be used properly as it is a beautiful and elegant language.

Kadir was at UMS to launch and participate in a dialogue about issues and challenges of strategic communication in new Malaysia.

Also present were UMS Humanity, Arts and Heritage Faculty dean Prof Dr Ismail Ibrahim and Sabah Journalists Association president Muguntan Vanar.

On a separate matter, Kadir said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is satisfied with the performances of Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department P. Waytha Moorthy because he works closely with them.

"Dr Mahathir is the Prime Minister. So he would be closer to his ministers, and know them better. If he is satisfied with their performances, then it should be accepted because he interacts with them regularly.

"We don't sit in the Cabinet meetings, or any sessions with these ministers. So, what the Prime Minister said is based on his own assessment as their leader," he told reporters.

Kadir had earlier written in his blog advising both ministers to listen to the Prime Minister's advice, telling Waytha Moorthy not to be so "gung-ho" and embarrass the Yang di-Pertuan Agong or Dr Mahathir. —The Star