

Hisham: Exams to remain bilingual

The Star p8 N14 31.10.07

Otherwise, gap between rural and urban schools will widen

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KUALA LUMPUR: It is definite – students will continue to have the option of using two languages for Science and Mathematics subjects in public examinations.

Responding to various reports on the matter, Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein reiterated that the Government had decided to maintain the status quo.

“It will remain bilingual,” he told reporters after presenting prizes to the winners of the F1 in Schools Technology Challenge.

The biggest problem, he added, concerned those in primary schools and rural schools.

“If we insist on one language, there will be a major impact on these pupils and will increase the gap between those in rural and urban areas. So we will maintain the bilingual approach,” he said.

He was clarifying news reports yesterday which had quoted him as saying that the decision not to force students to use only English for the two subjects in the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) would only be confined to next year.

Hishammuddin said much also depended on the teachers’ abilities, noting that while many had been trained, there was room for further improvement.

“Maintaining the policy won’t affect anyone, as students will have the option of answering in English, Chinese, Tamil or Bahasa Malaysia, depending on their capabilities,” he said.

The policy of teaching Science and Mathematics in English was implemented in phases, starting off with Year One, Form One and Lower Six students in 2003, and the initial plan was to have students answer only in English for these subjects from next year.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had announced that UPSR candidates would continue to have the choice of taking the two subjects in either English or Bahasa Malaysia or the vernacular language of their school.

Hishammuddin had then said on Sunday that secondary students would also continue to have the dual-language option in public examinations.

Meanwhile, the minister also said at the function that the focus for November under the *National Education Blueprint 2006-2010* would be on strengthening national schools. He said this was to ensure that they would be the school of choice.

“We want to improve their performance in various areas and offer programmes that meet the requirements of parents from different backgrounds,” he said.