

Thumbs-up for English must-pass

BY RAHIMY RAHIM AND VICTORIA BROWN

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Employers Federation has given the thumbs up for the Government's decision to make English a must-pass subject in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examinations next year despite pressure from certain groups.

Its secretary Datuk Shamsudin Bardan said the plan would enable school-leavers to master the language and give them an advantage in securing employment.

"I think the move will go on to benefit our graduates. Obviously, one of the major setbacks for employers is that many school-leavers have a poor command of the English language.

"This effort will take us towards the right direction," he said yesterday in response to the Government's decision on the must-pass plan although it had received several memorandums from groups to delay the requirement.

JobStreet.com's country manager Chook Yuh Yng concurred, saying that the move would ensure better employability of fresh graduates.

"From our survey, 91% in the private sector use English as the medium of business communication," he added.

Online recruitment portal *myStarjob.com* manager Ivy Leong said based on all job postings on the website last year, more than 80% of employers selected English language as part of the requirements.

"The move will encourage our school-leavers to focus on the importance of the language and in turn, boost their chance of being employed after graduation," she said.

Some Malaysians expressed hope for better-trained English-language teachers in local schools before the requirement is imposed.

"How about the teachers and educators? They too should have a must-pass in English, regardless of which subject they teach," remarked Suan Yao Yong.

Said Matthew J. Hassan: "This should have been enforced 15 years ago. The standard of English among today's local university graduates is appalling."

However, Carlucci Noel said that just passing might not be enough and that students should practise the language outside classrooms as well.

Wan Nor Adzahari agreed, saying that many students can understand English but were still unable to speak it well.

"The must-pass policy is good. But has our Education Department prepared the students for this requirement? Are we being fair to the students, especially in the rural areas?" asked Lm Foo.

Others said exam papers should be marked fairly without lowering the passing grade.

"Be transparent ... there's no point in lowering the passing mark and then bragging that many students have passed," said English-language teacher Suresh Ramasamy.

Connie Looi, a mother of four, said this was the only way to raise the standard of education in Malaysia.