

# A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By AP Dr Santhi Raghavan

January 2009 sees a new change in OUM – its transition into fully using English as the main language for teaching and learning. English language, the de facto working language of most nations, will now be the medium of instruction for almost all programmes in OUM, except of course for language-based programmes such as Bahasa Malaysia, Arabic Studies, Chinese Studies and Tamil Studies.

When asked why there was a need for this move, Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil, OUM's Senior Vice President, said: "We feel that English is an important language that can propel the nation towards development and progress.

"English is an international language, transcending the barriers of distance, race and creed. The language of communication in major international meetings is English. It is also the lingua franca of the business and commercial world."

On whether this transition has caused anxiety among OUM learners and if they were receiving it with mixed feelings, Prof Mansor explained that while most of our learners did indeed learn English as a second language, they actually acquired it through use and interaction at the workplace.

"Though we may not be native users, that should not stop us from embracing the language as a language of technology," he said.

Many of our learners feel that the use of English as the medium of instruction for teaching and learning at the tertiary level is a step in the right direction. In fact, government school teachers from both primary and secondary levels too are now teaching two major subjects in school, namely, Science and Mathematics, in English.

This move by OUM will not diminish the role and importance of Bahasa Malaysia. According to Prof Mansor, while the pivotal role of the national language as the official language of the country remains unquestionable, the role of English should not be underestimated.

So what does OUM expect of its learners? Prof Mansor replied that OUM learners have been gradually introduced to the transition from Bahasa Malaysia to English since 2003. As a caring University, OUM is not imposing overnight changes. Instead, the change has been slow and



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steady, with examinations and assignments presented in bilingual format so as to give a choice to learners on which language to answer in.

Nevertheless, Prof Mansor expects learners to progress in their command of English. This will help them to better explore the latest developments in the world and to acquire a greater store of knowledge. This would be in line with Malaysia's goal of attaining the status of a fully developed nation by 2020. OUM's efforts can be seen as an attempt to create excellence through education, Prof Mansor concluded. **TCX**