

Support for City Hall action on non-bilingual signboards

► Status of Malay language enshrined in Federal Constitution and use in official matters mandated, says expert

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PETALING JAYA: Bilingual signboards in Malaysia that prioritise the Malay language are in line with the Advertisement By-Laws (Federal Territories) 1982 and the Local Government Act 1976, and should not be questioned, said experts.

They were responding to Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, who disagreed with enforcement of bilingual signboard regulations by Kuala Lumpur City Hall, stating that it has caused dissatisfaction and created negative perceptions among tourists.

Tiong was reacting to a large-scale operation last Thursday in Segambut, Pudu and Jalan Silang in Kuala Lumpur targeting signboards that do not feature the Malay language or were not bilingual.

Linguistic expert Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Nik Safiah Karim said efforts should focus on strengthening the role of the national

language rather than over-accommodating tourists as this is essential for preserving national identity and unity.

"Tourists generally understand and respect each country's rules and regulations regarding the use of their national language on signboards. As long as sufficient information is provided in English to aid navigation, there should be no issue," she said.

Nik Safiah added that the National Language Policy is clear and has been in place for a long time, yet it is still not being respected.

"I support signboards in the national language with some bilingual elements for the benefit of foreign tourists. I urge all parties to be aware of the policy and to respect it," she said.

UiTM Academy of Language Studies Centre for Malay Language Studies head Dr Rozaimah Rashidin said criticism by the minister regarding signboards does not need to be politicised.

She noted that every local authority has established laws and regulations, and such issues should be handled with care and tact.

"The status of the Malay language as the national and official language is enshrined in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution, which mandates its use in official matters, including public displays such as road signs, noticeboards and public information boards," she said.

Rozaimah explained that enforcement by City Hall aims to ensure business premises

adhere to the Advertisement By-Laws (Federal Territories) 1982 and the Local Government Act 1976.

"Are signboards emphasising the national language truly creating dissatisfaction and negative perceptions among tourists? Comprehensive surveys or studies considering tourist feedback are needed to substantiate such claims.

"The Malay language, along with local dialects, other languages and ethnic tongues, represents unique cultural elements that the ministry itself should highlight as part of Malaysia's tourism products, underscoring that 'language is the soul of the nation,'" she said.

She emphasised that the sovereignty of the Malay language must be upheld without sidelining other languages in the country.

"Current regulations do not negatively impact tourist perceptions of Malaysia's inclusiveness if enforced firmly. Prioritising the national language highlights the Malay language as a cultural symbol, offering tourists a meaningful and authentic experience that fosters deeper engagement with Malaysia's rich and diverse heritage."

Rozaimah said in cultural preservation, language is the most accessible asset to symbolise and sustain a community's heritage.

"Tourism industry players incorporating the Malay language and other local languages into their offerings adopt a smart strategy to preserve cultural heritage."



Rozaimah said the sovereignty of the Malay language must be upheld without sidelining other languages. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN