

PM'S WORD ON SCHOOLS

By Kalimullah Hassan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked the Chinese and Indian communities to have faith in the Government's promise that it would never abolish vernacular schools.

"We will not go against the wishes of parents who want their children to study in their mother tongue. Do not doubt our promises," he said at the official opening of the Damansara Jaya primary school here today.

Dr Mahathir, in apparent reference to Section 21 (2) of the Education Act which gives the Education Minister the power to convert Chinese or Tamil schools to national-type schools, said:

"The Government has never had the intention to abolish or convert vernacular schools unless parents of children in that school wish otherwise.

"But since this has now been turned into a political issue, the Government will ensure that parents have nothing to worry about," he said.

Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim said last week that if the Barisan Nasional won the elections, it would amend the Act to ensure that vernacular schools could only be converted to national-type schools if teachers and parents of children in that school wanted it.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was the only country in the world which allowed its citizens to choose the language of instruction.

"We have Chinese and Tamil schools and we find children of various races, including Malays, studying in these schools," he said.

Earlier, at the opening of the new Hulu Langat-Klang highway,

Dr Mahathir said that unlike the Barisan, opposition parties could not provide development.

He said the DAP, for example, had made election pledges which it knew it could not keep.

"They are contesting less than 90 of the 177 seats. Even if they win all their seats, they cannot form the Government. How are they going to keep their promise?"

The DAP had promised, among other things, to repeal Section 21 (2) of the Education Act and abolish the New Economic Policy.

Dr Mahathir said that PAS, which was contesting 98 seats, could not keep its election promises for the same reason.

He described the opposition parties as opportunists and advised the people to vote Barisan to ensure development and peace. He said the people should not fall for the DAP's cry of denying the coalition a two-thirds majority.

Asked by reporters later whether he was worried that the opposition could win enough seats to deny the Barisan a two-thirds majority, Dr Mahathir said: "I am convinced we will win more than two-thirds."

On whether the reduced number of seats won unopposed by the Barisan this time was an indicator that the opposition was stronger, he said: "That's because the (nomination) forms are easier to fill."

He said the opposition parties had also tried to field candidates in all constituencies because they were confident they could win.

"We have a foolhardy opposition which wants to contest for no reason."

He added that PAS had even put up candidates in Sabah where it had no support.