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Mahathir-Language

M'SIANS SPEAK MOTHER-TONGUE, BUT YET PATRIOTIC, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 4 (Bernama) -- Patriotism and love for Malaysia remain high among the country's multi-racial citizens although the national education system allows them to use their mother tongue in schools, said the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The national language may not be the medium of instruction in vernacular schools, but, he said "this does not mean that students are not taught about being loyal and loving the country."

Dr Mahathir said this when delivering a key-note address at an education seminar for headmasters of national-type Chinese schools nation-wide in Seri Kembangan here today.

What Malaysians should bear in mind was that Malaysia is their country and that love for the country should be nurtured among their children, he said.

Malaysia would need to depend on its loyal citizens to sustain harmony and continued prosperity, he said.

The prime minister also reminded teachers in national-type and national schools not to regard teaching merely as a livelihood.

They were, in fact, carrying with them a national responsibility to bring up future generations which could take on global challenges with the knowledge acquired, he said.

The prime minister said teachers pre-occupied themselves with side activities other than teaching would only create future generations ill-equipped with knowledge.

"Such teachers are actually betraying their own race... given that imparting knowledge is ever important than before," he said.

The wide use of the mother tongue in schools also reflected the tolerance that prevailed in the country in preserving racial harmony, he said.

"There is no compulsion to use only the national language," Dr Mahathir said stressing that parents too enjoyed the freedom of sending their children either to national or national-type schools.

The prime minister described as a healthy development the trend for Malay parents to send their children to national-type Chinese schools as long as there was no obstruction against them mastering and conversing in the national language.

Dr Mahathir also touched on proposals raised earlier in the welcoming speech by Malaysian National Union of Headmasters president Kang Siew Khoo on ways to resolve problems faced by national-type Chinese schools.

While giving his undertaking that the government would attend to the proposals, the prime minister said the government could not meet all the demands of the various communities.

"We have our reasons for not fulfilling all demands. Other communities make demands as well and they too don't get 100 per cent what they wanted," he said.

Dr Mahathir said none of the communities enjoyed overly-special treatment from the government and this was the key to Malaysia's success in minimising racial tension.

Kang, in his speech, among others, asked the government to help alleviate the current shortage of about 5,000 teachers in national-type Chinese schools.

He said the problem could be partly resolved by limiting enrolment to

only 35 students per class.

The union also proposed that;

- \* attachment teachers be offered to attend courses during holidays; and
- \* the service of contract teachers be extended.

Kang also asked headmasters and teachers to instil love for the country in the students and groom them into a respectful and grateful generation.

Also present were Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

-- BERNAMA

MAM RYN