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Patriotism not diluted by vernacular schools, says PM

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THE flexibility of the national education system, that allows vernacular schools to use non-national languages, has not diluted the rakyat's patriotism.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the feeling of patriotism is still high among the multi-racial Malaysians.

"The national language may not be the medium of instruction in vernacular schools but it does not mean that students are not taught about love for their country and loyalty.

"What Malaysians should bear in mind is that this is their country and they should nurture love for the country in their children," he said in his keynote address at an education seminar for headmasters of national-type Chinese schools in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Reminding teachers not to regard teaching as just a livelihood, Dr Mahathir said they should realise that they are carrying out a national responsibility in bringing up a future generation.

"If teachers use their teaching time for other activities instead of imparting knowledge to students, it will mean ill-equipped future generations," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the use of other languages in local schools showed the tolerant nature of the Government in preserving inter-racial relations.

"There is no force in encouraging the use of the national language.

Parents are free to send their children to any schools - whether vernacular or not.

"The mere existence and increasing trends of Malay parents sending their children to vernacular Chinese schools is a healthy development as long as the children are free to speak the national language," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is the only country that allows other languages be used as the medium of instruction in schools.

He said the country recognised the importance of education and gives it ample significance spending not less than 20 per cent of the budget allocation on education.

"With peace and harmony in the country, we can further develop the country. Now, people are imitating our way of governance. It is better to have 30 per cent of something substantial (in terms of riches) than 100 per cent of zero growth," he added.

Dr Mahathir said it is now the era of knowledge and those without knowledge will not be successful as they will not be able to compete.

"We have high ambitions to be developed but it is difficult without trying. I believe in Malaysians. If we can realise our abilities to supply our children with knowledge, we can be successful in the next millennium," he added.

On proposals by the Malaysian National Union of Headmasters on ways to resolve problems faced by vernacular Chinese schools, Dr Mahathir said that the Government will look into ways to resolve the problems but added that it may not be able to meet all the needs of all communities.

"We have our reasons for not fulfilling all demands. Other communities make demands as well and they too do not 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.

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