

On with vision schools

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Those against the idea don't want unity, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon: The government will not drop its plan to have more vision schools despite opposition from a group of Chinese educationists, the Prime Minister said today.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the concept of vision school is aimed at promoting unity among all Malaysians from young and those who are against it are actually opposed to efforts to promote unity.

"The concept of vision school is for unity and it is not related to the Chinese language or Chinese schools," the PM said. "We want Malaysians from all races to start living together from school days."

Mahathir said there is a small group of extremist Chinese educationists who are opposing the idea despite assurances given by the government.

He said their disapproval is actually against the process of uniting Malaysians and has nothing to do with defending the Chinese language or conducting lessons in that language.

"Even the Education Act was amended some time ago to revoke the Education Minister's power to transform Chinese schools into national type schools," he said. "We did this some time ago because this group called for it and we were hopeful that this move will put an end to all the problems."

The PM was speaking after launching an internet service today. Last Friday, MCA President Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said five Chinese primary schools have turned down the government's offer to participate as vision schools.

He said while the government respected their decision, it will build two vision schools – one in Subang Jaya, Selangor, and the other in Johor Baru.

Opposition by the Chinese community to the idea was attributed as one reason why many Chinese voters in Lunas voted against the Barisan Nasional which lost the recent by-election.

Mahathir said today that when he referred to "extremist" Chinese educationists, he did not refer to all members of the Chinese community. It referred to a only small group of people who are delib-

erately bringing up this issue with the intention of stopping the process of uniting Malaysians.

He said they did not act like Malaysians and do not want to accept the fact that our children need to mix with other races. Their actions can be likened to blackmailing the government and that's the reason he called them extremists.

"I will reprimand any extremist faction, be it Malay, Chinese or Indian because there is no place for extremists in Malaysia and we are of the opinion that the vision school concept does not obstruct the advancement of Chinese schools," said Mahathir, adding that the

idea of having university students of different races stay together will also be continued as it is a form of integration.

Asked to comment on MCA vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng's statement yesterday on the need to review the vision school concept, Mahathir said the matter will be looked into to see what was it that people find objectionable.

"Attempts to separate the Chinese from other races hinder the process of uniting Malaysians," Mahathir said. "Chinese schools are not separate although they use the Chinese language as the medium of instruction ... they are Malaysian schools."