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Present education system is single stream, says Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR Mon Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the single stream education system is already in practise through the National School System.

When the national school system was established there were already Chinese and Tamil schools and the government aided them so that they need not close down, he said.

Mahathir said that it was also hoped that the students would eventually join the national schools.

He was asked to comment on the proposal that single stream schools be set up after chairing the Dewan Rakyat pre council meeting for Barisan Nasional representatives at Parliament House here.

Mahathir said what happened later was that the national schools were perceived as controlled by those trying to turn these schools into Islamic religious schools, resulting in the Chinese and Indians losing interest in going to the national schools.

He added: "We pledged to have the people's own language teachers but we were unable to supply them. This did not come about through government policy."

"We are going to train more teachers. Please persuade the people to join the teaching profession and become teachers of their own language."

"We want them to learn their own language. This is one country in Southeast Asia or perhaps the only country in the world where the language of the non-bumiputras are actually provided for and encouraged by the government."

Mahathir was confident that if the national schools were made more attractive, more Indian and Chinese stu-

dents would be interested in joining.

He said: "We will ensure that Muslim students do not try to force non-Muslims to follow their lifestyle such as forcing them to wear the headscarf or *tudung* and so on."

"They will get the same education and also learn their mother tongue and there will be no pressure on them to accept the customs and ways of Muslims."

Three cabinet ministers also came out in support of the present system, saying that it need not be changed.

Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said the establishment of the vision schools and integration at schools were the best ways to forge unity among the multi-racial society, he added.

"The vision school programme will continue and I sincerely want the community to give their support for both these efforts as it has no other motive except to forge unity," he reported at Parliament House after attending the first meeting of the third session of the 10th Parliament opened by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah here.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the recent clashes in Old Klang Road did not start because of the current system of having national and vernacular schools.

Samy Vellu, who is MIC president, said it started because of the squalid living conditions in the area and also because of poverty.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Ling Liong Sik said what is more important is that children from different vernacular schools near each other should be allowed to mix through functions at each others' schools to promote integration and unity.