

# Face the facts

STAR - 1 OCT 2001

## PM: Find out why standard of national schools has dropped

■ By SA'ODAH ELIAS

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Educationists have to identify the reasons for the decline in the standard of national schools and act to overcome the shortcomings, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said they should be willing to accept the real reasons even if the truth exposed past mistakes.

Opening the Malay Education Congress here yesterday, the Prime Minister said over-zealous educationists, driven by their desire to create tried to extend the acceptance of the National Language as the medium of instruction.

"There were ministers who changed Chinese and Tamil schools into national schools and there were ministers who closed English schools and turned them into Malay-medium schools with the intention of expanding the use of the national language as quickly as possible," he said.

Dr Mahathir said when all the English schools were closed, many non-Malay parents sent their children to Chinese schools instead of national schools, resulting in the Chinese schools seeing a

sudden influx of students.

"This is what happens when we try to use the education system for purposes not related to education, in this case to expand the language," he added.

Noting that the performance of national schools continued to slide, Dr Mahathir said in the beginning there were still many non-Malay students enrolled in national schools but since recently, their numbers were declining.

"On the other hand, many Malay students chose to go to Chinese schools where the medium of instruction is Mandarin. Why is there a drop in the number of non-Malays going to national schools and a rise in the number of Malays going to Chinese schools?" he asked.

He said that today, national schools had become almost similar to Islamic religious schools, in terms of philosophy and practice.

"If any quarters in the school direct that something be done in the name of Islam, no one would dare to oppose it. Even if the directive does not come from the ministry or the headmaster and if the religious basis for the directive is weak, no

■ Turn to P2

# Dr M: Exam results leave much to be desired

■ From P1

one will object," he said.

He cited the rule requiring boys to wear long pants while playing football as an example, stating that even in Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, football players wore shorts.

He said many other moves which purported reflected Islam were imposed in the national schools, resulting in the Chinese shying away from enrolling their children into these schools.

Dr Mahathir said the most unfortunate thing was that the performance of national schools was poor when it came to examination results.

He said there were teachers who placed priority on politics rather than on their responsibility to teach and those who over-indulged in the politics of hate against the government to the point where the true teachings of Islam were neglected.

He said that with proper encouragement and the right spirit, Malay students would be able to acquire scientific, technical and other knowledge with outstanding results, adding that while the government had initiated plans to improve the lot of the Malays, its efforts would be fruitless without support from the Malay community.

Dr Mahathir urged teachers and religious scholars to disseminate what Islam taught about acquiring knowledge and oppose views that learning was a secular or worldly pursuit.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said the government had no plans to re-introduce English as the medium of instruction in national schools or to lessen the focus on Bahasa Malaysia but would instead stress the teaching of English to enable students to have a better command.

"I am not saying that having Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in schools is not good, but it should not be at the exclusion of English which is an important international language. As an international language, we cannot run from the reality that we need to be able to understand English if we are not to be left behind in this era of information technology.

"What needs to be done is for those concerned to encourage Malay students to change their mindset and attitude because the government can only do so much, as in the adage that there is not much point in bringing the horse to water if it is not interested in it," he said.