

09/08/2001

`Don't make it a racial issue'

Ramlan Said; Chok Suat Ling; Abdul Razak Ahmad; Firdaus Abdullah
KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned Chinese newspapers not to make a racial issue of the difference in the eligibility criteria for school textbook loans in national and national-type schools.

He said the difference in the criteria was to make the loan scheme in national schools more attractive to students.

"If there is no difference in the criteria for national and national-type schools, there will be no attraction for students to go to national schools," he said after briefing Umno members on plans to introduce university admission based on merit.

The Chinese newspapers have, for the last two weeks, highlighted the issue and urged that national-type schools be allowed to use the same eligibility criteria as national schools.

In national schools, children from a family whose monthly income is less than RM2,000 are eligible for textbooks under the scheme. In national-type schools, they will only be eligible if the family income is less than RM700.

The Prime Minister said the Cabinet had, nevertheless, agreed to raise the criteria for national-type schools to "less than RM1,000".

This means all children from a family whose monthly income is less than RM1,000 is eligible for textbooks.

"This has nothing to do with race, but with schools. Whether a Chinese or Malay student goes to a national-type Chinese school, he or she will get the same benefit."