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Ministry warns HMs (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Headmasters and principals were today told not to use overlapping timetables as an excuse to segregate pupils based on race.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin said segregation ran contrary to the National Education Policy which sought to integrate the races.

He warned that action would be taken against headmasters and principals if they practised racial segregation for no apparent reason.

Aziz also directed State education departments to submit individual reports to the ministry in three weeks on the extent of racial segregation in schools in their States.

He said timetables were never a problem in the past and should not be used as an excuse.

"Pupils who take Pendidikan Moral can be moved to another class if Agama Islam is being taught. But this should be for that particular subject and for one period only, not permanently," he said after the launch of the Tun Ismail Mohamed Ali Gallery at Menara PNB in Jalan Tun Razak today by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Aziz said he would personally lead a team to inspect schools to ensure that racial segregation was not being practised.

National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam last week described as "rubbish" the excuse that pupils of different races were placed in different classes for administrative purposes and to make it easier to conduct religious and moral lessons.

Siva Subramaniam said the NUTP could teach the schools involved how to set timetables for their pupils if that was the problem.

Yesterday, NUTP president Tengku Habsah Tengku Petera said the union would submit a memorandum to Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad.

In the memorandum, the NUTP listed 125 primary and national-type schools, and 75 secondary schools involved in racial segregation.

Copies of the memorandum will be sent to Dr Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The memorandum also calls for action against headmasters who have deviated from government policy.

Aziz also said schools were also not allowed to hold "special classes" for a specific race.

The NUTP alleged that certain schools were organising special classes for Bumiputeras.

Aziz thanked the NUTP for bringing up the issue.

"If the matter is found to be true, then we will be even more thankful to the union for bringing it out in the open. The ministry looks at NUTP's revelation positively because, like the NUTP, the Government is also against racial segregation."

Dr Mahathir said the matter would be investigated.

He said sometimes the ministry might not be aware of things that took place on the ground.

Siva Subramaniam when met today said the union was ready to meet officials from the ministry's internal investigation committee to provide information on the segregation issue.

"We are confident that there will be a solution that will please everyone. This problem will definitely be resolved by the Government," Siva said.

Siva said the NUTP was "happy" with Dr Mahathir's statement yesterday calling for strict action to correct any misinterpretation or manipulation of the Government's education policy.

"People should stop coming to any conclusion now. There should be an investigation, a report presented and ways suggested to remedy the situation," he said.

Asked if there was a need for the Education Ministry to issue a circular to schools to stop the alleged practice of segregating pupils, Siva said:

"The Prime Minister's directive or statement is sufficient."

Siva was also asked about Dr Mahathir's acknowledgement of constraints faced by the Government in dealing with issues relating to the education policy.

He agreed that there were problems and that it was not easy to solve them.

"We also say that not all the complaints received by us are true. At the same time, the ministry's answers are not all perfect.

"The constraints are that we cannot please everybody as we have multi-lingual schools.

"But we must ensure that no matter what happens, national unity and integration must be the ultimate aim of every Malaysian," Siva said.

He admitted that it was possible that some schools on the union's list of schools allegedly undertaking segregation may not be guilty of the practice as the list compiled by the NUTP was based on parents' feedback.  
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