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PM: Act against segregation (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight called for strict action to correct any misinterpretation or manipulation of the Government's policy on education.

"We can look into this from the administrative angle, we can conduct our own departmental investigations," the Prime Minister said.

He added that the Government has been working hard to avoid segregation.

"If it is happening it is not because we planned it.

"It is never the Government's policy to segregate races. As you know, we have tried our level best to re-group them (children) in their formative years, when they are young."

Dr Mahathir, however, acknowledged constraints faced by the Government in dealing with issues relating to the education policy.

He said that very recently the Government had tried to group together the various race-based and national-type schools to create a harmonious environment, but certain quarters objected to the idea.

On the call by the National Union of the Teaching Profession to set up a tribunal to consider the views and complaints of parents, Dr Mahathir said there was no need to do so and that it was sufficient that corrective action be taken at department and ministry levels.

"We can conduct departmental investigations, I don't think there is a need to set up a tribunal."

Dr Mahathir said certain government officers may have interpreted the education policy differently.

He said action should be taken to correct the wrong and not turn it into an issue which may hamper race relations.

The Prime Minister was speaking after launching the PNB Darby Park serviced-apartments here.

The proposal for the tribunal is included in a NUTP memorandum which will be sent to Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad next week.

The 18-page memorandum contains an "initial" list of schools involved in segregating pupils.

The NUTP has listed 125 primary and national-type schools, and 75 secondary schools.

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 the Government's policy.

NUTP president Tengku Habsah Tengku Petera released the list of "errant" schools at a Press conference today.

Copies of the memorandum will be sent to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The memorandum also called for action against headmasters who had deviated from the Government's policy.

NUTP president Tengku Habsah Tengku Petera released the list of "errant" schools at a Press conference today.

"As responsible Malaysians, we must oppose all acts to segregate students according to their race. Segregation is very dangerous to integration and the future of the country," she said.

Tengku Habsah said the union has asked for a meeting with Education Minister and his deputies.

Tengku Habsah said of late there had been several "undesirable" acts

that had been implemented at various levels of the Education Ministry.

"If these acts are allowed to go on they can threaten the national education policy and hamper efforts to raise Malaysian education to international standard," she said.

Tengku Habsah said these acts included:

- * segregating students supposedly to make it easier to teach morals and Islamic studies;

- * setting up "special planning" classes in secondary schools in all States;

- * denying places in top classes in spite of excellent academic performance;

(there have been cases where students were asked to write a "consent letter" not to attend moral class as a condition to being placed in top classes); and,

- * denying prizes or awards to students although they had excellent examination results.

NUTP said segregating had resulted in the flow of Chinese students from national schools to national-type Chinese schools over the past 10 years and decreasing number of Indian students in national schools.

"NUTP has to raise this issue through the mass media after being challenged (on the issue). We chose the mass media as the issue will be settled quickly," Tengku Habsah said.

"The NUTP as a responsible professional body does not see this matter as a racial issue."

She said there was obvious segregation of students in schools under the guise of "special plans" and said the union questioned the need to have such plans in ordinary schools.

"Is this the way to raise children as the heirs to our beloved country, a plural and harmonious country?"

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