

# PM wants end to controversy over NUTP's claims

B. v. K. PARKARAN and FREDERICK FERNANDEZ

STAR 30 MAR 2002

PETALING JAYA: The Prime Minister wants an end to the controversy over claims of racial segregation in schools, and in an immediate response, National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam has apologised over the matter.

Siva Subramaniam said he respected Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's advice to put the raging dispute to rest, which he said was in the interest of the nation.

"Every civil servant, irrespective of his or her position, must respect the decision of the Dr Mahathir and the Government.

"Since I became the president of Cuepacs five years ago, I have emphasised on the need for civil servants to be loyal to the government of the day. And when there's a request or an order from the Prime Minister, I will abide by it faithfully," he said in an interview last night.

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Siva Subramaniam said in the history of his 30 years in unionism, he had never gone against the request or order of the Prime Minister.

"Dr Mahathir is a great man and I apologise to him if the issue hurt the feelings of any party, especially him," he added.

Speaking in Shah Alam after opening the Selangor Barisan Nasional convention yesterday, Dr Mahathir urged the parties planning to sue the NUTP, its president Tengku

Habsah Peter a and Siva Subramaniam to call off their plans.

He said the matter should be put to rest and the people should not try to capitalise on it by filing million-ringgit suits, claiming that the reputation of their schools and the Education Ministry had been tarnished.

"There is no need to deliberate on the issue further. Human beings make mistakes and we have to accept that. Once he apologises, that should be enough and the matter should be considered

settled. What is the point of getting into a conflict over this?" Dr Mahathir said, adding that he personally did not see the image of the implicated schools or the ministry as being tarnished because of the allegation.

He said this when asked to comment about police reports lodged by schools and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) against the NUTP. Siva Subramaniam and Tengku Habsah over their claims.

Asked if he felt that the NLJTP had made "a grave mistake" in making such claims,

Dr Mahathir said: "I do not see it as a big mistake. What I would consider a big mistake is the move by certain quarters to oppose our intention of getting our pupils to integrate in schools.

"The allegation is actually saying that we are not (racially) integrating pupils in schools, which is part of the government policy, so he is wrong."

He said the claim was different from the criticism against the creation of Vision Schools to integrate pupils of various races.

Dr Mahathir said such allegations, which were fanned by the opposition, were unfounded as under the Education Act 1996, the Education Minister no longer has the power to convert vernacular schools into national schools.

"Previously, they said once this legislation to protect vernacular schools was made, the issue would be solved but they are still harping on it," he said.

The Education Ministry had set up an independent committee to probe the allegation of racial segregation in schools and concluded last

week that there was no hidden agenda to segregate students along racial lines.

Federal police public relations officer Supt Jamshah Mustapa confirmed that they recorded statements from Siva Subramaniam and Tengku Habsah yesterday.

He said the two spent five hours at the federal police headquarters to help investigations into the claims.

The investigations were carried out following police reports lodged by PTAs from six schools in Taiping and Kuala Lumpur.