

'Don't incite'

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PM warns groups against stoking English usage issue

■ By SA'ODAH ELIAS

TANJUNG MALIM: The Prime Minister has issued a strong warning to certain "extremist" groups to stop inciting the Chinese over the proposed use of English in teaching Mathematics and Science in Chinese primary schools.

Stressing that the Government would go ahead with the plan as scheduled next year, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said extremists had gone around trying to provoke the community by saying that the proposal was a prelude to the Government closing down Chinese schools or turning them into national schools.

"They are playing with fire. They know that the law (the Education Act) does not allow the Government to close down Chinese schools, yet they still go around trying to instil this fear. This is very dangerous.

"I would like to remind them not to create issues like this or the Government will be compelled to act. Some people may think that just because they are prominent personalities the authorities dare not take action against them.

"But in Malaysia, if somebody does something to fan racial sentiments to the extent of creating unrest, the Government will act," he said, adding that the warning was also meant for certain newspapers that had been regularly highlighting racial issues.

He said the extremist groups did not have strong influence but used the press to stoke the feelings of the people.

Dr Mahathir, who visited Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris near here, stressed that the Government had no intention of changing Chinese schools to national schools, adding that the law already prevented this.

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PM: Leaders must sacrifice some interests

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"Previously they wanted the Government to amend the law and we consented. Yet, they still go around telling people that we want to convert Chinese schools into national schools," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the extremist groups not only opposed the move to use English in the teaching of the two subjects but also did not wish to see Malay and Chinese children mixing together, as proven by their opposition to the Vision School concept.

Addressing students of the university earlier, Dr Mahathir called on them to place impor-

ance on the mastery of English to enable them to acquire knowledge in modern subjects.

"This is not about protecting your mother tongue but about seeking greater knowledge. If the only way for us to do it is by improving our mastery in English or other languages, so be it," he said, urging students to mix in campus irrespective of their race to ensure continuous racial harmony.

Later in Ipoh, Dr Mahathir urged Barisan Nasional component parties to ignore the extremists' demands, report **RASLAN BAHAROM** and **MAZNI MUSTAFA**.

He said if the parties succumbed, only PAS would bene-

fit, because Umno would be made to appear as sidelining the importance of Bahasa Malaysia on one hand and defend the use of Mandarin on the other.

"Don't politicise the teaching of Maths and Science in English because the matter is not political," he said in his speech at a luncheon with Perak Barisan Nasional leaders at the Perak Mentri Besar's official residence.

He said leaders must be willing to sacrifice some of the interests of their communities for the sake of the nation, adding that learning in English would not change one's identity because only two subjects

would be taught in English.

"I studied in Malay from Year Two when I was in primary school. After that, I studied in English until I graduated."

"Do I look like *orang putih* (a white man)?" he asked, raising laughter in the gathering.

Dr Mahathir said even China was asking its people to master English, adding that the trend was the same in Russia and Germany, where undergraduates were also taught in English.

"The Barisan's intention is sincere, to upgrade the standard of English among Malaysians so that they will be able to communicate at the international level," he said.

Citing an example, he said the

Malays had sacrificed the Jawi script for the Roman script and they were willing to have the name "Persekutuan Tanah Melayu" changed to "Malaysia" in the course of gaining independence 45 years ago.

"The Chinese and Indians were very grateful with the sacrifices made by the Malays and in return both the communities let go some of their interests, too," he said.

He hoped the level of tolerance shown in the past would continue to enable the country to be viewed highly by others.

