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Cabinet to study proposals (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The Cabinet will study all counter-proposals on the Government's decision to use English in the teaching of Science and Mathematics, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister today gave an assurance the Cabinet would look into the proposals and views, including those from Barisan Nasional component parties.

"We will study everything ... we will study every proposal."

He was responding to media queries on the matter after presenting prizes to the winners of the Formula One Powerboat World Championship Malaysian Grand Prix 2002 at the Sapura Holdings headquarters in Seri Kembangan, near here.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Gerakan's stand on the issue. Yesterday, its president Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik announced the party's objection to the move to teach the two subjects in English from Standard One next year.

Lim presented counter-proposals drawn up by the party's central committee which, among others, called for English terminology to be introduced in textbooks in both subjects from Standard Four, with some bilingual texts for Standards Five and Six.

Gerakan also advocated that implementation should begin in 2004 and cover national and national-type schools, and that the existing medium of instruction in both subjects be retained.

Lim also suggested steps to improve English in all primary schools, including introducing the language in national-type primary schools at Standard One instead of Standard Three as at present.

However, the People's Progressive Party criticised Gerakan's stand as "a stab in the back".

PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas urged Gerakan to stay out of the meetings between the Barisan Nasional Chinese-based parties, adding that their stand went against the grain of consensus and collective agreement within the coalition.

Kayveas said the stand was an embarrassment to the Cabinet.

He said the PPP would send three representatives to the next meeting between the parties, as 40 per cent of the party's members were Chinese.

Separately, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein warned all quarters that the movement would oppose any attempt to use the issue to inflame racial or religious sentiment.

"We are not stopping anybody from debating it, but if you are going to debate it based on religion or race and you are going to fan emotions, then we (Umno Youth) stand against such moves.

"If you want to propose anything, if you have constructive ideas on how this could be implemented better, nobody is stopping you. But if you link that with racial and religious sentiment, then it becomes dangerous, and that is when the authorities will come down hard on you," the Youth and Sports Minister said.

He said the Government was receptive to constructive proposals but not unwarranted statements and judgmental remarks.

On Friday, four of the five Chinese-based parties, including Gerakan, met but did not reach a consensus on the issue.

Lim, who is also Primary Industries Minister, has acknowledged that the issue had been blown out of context and coloured with a lot of emotion and

racial sentiment.

On Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka management board chairman Datuk Abdul Rahim Abu Bakar's remarks implying that the Government was bowing to pressure from superpower nations, Hishammuddin said Abdul Rahim should try to understand the issue before making such remarks.

"I think they (the board) are wrong and ill-intentioned. Our aim is to enhance the command of the English language and knowledge, nothing more, nothing less.

"The allegation is completely untrue and not in any way related to the issue. I feel they are irresponsible and are seeking to create trouble by fanning emotions. I hope the authorities will not tolerate such groups," he said.

Abdul Rahim, speaking at the opening of the National Graduates' Convention at DBP yesterday, said he failed to understand the rationale of the Government's decision and posed several hypothetical questions.