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PM: `Silent group' backs English plan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there was a significant number of Chinese parents who supported the Government's move to use English to teach Science and Mathematics in schools from next year, but that this "silent group" was not speaking up.

Dr Mahathir said the fact that more than 7,000 Chinese students from Johor alone chose to attend Singaporean schools using English as the medium of instruction proved that the community concurred with the Government on the importance of English.

"That clearly shows that there are people in the Chinese community who agree (with the Government's aim)," he said. "There are some people who do not agree but the ones who agree do not say anything."

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a news report today that more than 7,000 Chinese students from Johor opted out of secondary education in Malaysia to study in Singapore where instruction was in English.

The Prime Minister had earlier opened the Malaysian Felda Generation Assembly and Symposium at the International Islamic University here.

GPMS president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim was quoted as saying that the actual number of Chinese students opting for English-medium education in Singapore could be much higher if those from other States were included.

Suhaimi said the Chinese community in Malaysia, especially those of the upper echelon, supported the Government's move.

"Only the extremist groups are against the idea due to some hidden agenda," he suggested.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir announced that the Government would proceed with introducing English as the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science in all schools from next year.

He said the Government would not budge from the stand, but would consider the various counter-proposals on the method of implementation.

In a related development, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Government would not allow any debate advocating the abolition of Chinese and Tamil schools, as the existence of such schools was protected by law.

He warned those calling for the creation of a single national school system that they were treading on dangerous ground.

"The issue does not arise," he said, adding that such views were seditious.

He was speaking after opening LCL Group of Companies' new factories in Beranang near here. The Deputy Prime Minister also witnessed the awarding of the Sirim ISO9001 certificate to the company.

Abdullah was asked for his comment on several letters published in newspapers calling for national-type schools to be phased out. "The question of closing such schools does not arise," he said.

"Do not use this issue to incite the rakyat to hate and oppose the Government. Any suggestion (of closing national-type schools) is false."

On his meeting with Malay organisations, intellectuals and academicians tomorrow to discuss the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English, Abdullah said he would listen to their views.

He said the meeting was being held to give more parties the chance to express their views.

Responding to a suggestion that such feedback gathering should have been done before the Government decided on the matter, Abdullah said Dr

Mahathir had stated his willingness to consider all views.

"I will brief the Prime Minister on the outcome of tomorrow's meeting and after that, God willing, a decision will be made."

Abdullah said the decision would take into consideration all views, but pointed out that to date, the majority supported the need to raise the standard of English among students.

On the possibility of the Government postponing the teaching of the two subjects in English from next year as already announced, Abdullah replied: "I cannot predict."