

23/08/2002

English plan to go ahead (HL)

Firdaus Abdullah

NILAI, Thurs. - The Government will go ahead with its plan to introduce English as the medium of instruction in the teaching of Mathematics and Science in all schools beginning next year, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the Government would not budge from the decision but would take into consideration the various proposals, including those from Chinese-based parties within the Barisan Nasional, on the method of implementation.

"Yes! The Government is serious about introducing it next year but how we do it is another matter," he added.

Counter proposals would be evaluated before any further announcements, he said at a Press conference after attending the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of the Islamic University College of Malaysia's main campus here this morning.

Dr Mahathir said Chinese-based party leaders from the ruling front have expressed their views during a meeting with BN deputy chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday.

He also refuted claims that they (Chinese-based parties in the BN) had called on the Government to revoke the proposed implementation at vernacular schools.

"No, they are not asking us to revoke the plan; they are only concerned about the method of implementation," the BN chairman said, reiterating that the Government would look into the concerns of the community.

Warning those who attempt to manipulate the issue for ulterior motives, Dr Mahathir said the Government would institute legal action against them if they tried to deceive the people through lies.

"If they continue to harp on issues which could make the people restless and lead them towards illegal actions, we will take action.

"If they claim that the Government is planning to convert Chinese schools to national schools or hurl any similar accusations, while the law clearly prevents the Government from doing so, we will take legal action," he warned.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that the Government's aim was for the benefit of all Malaysians and not any one particular race or group.

Last Friday, Chinese-based parties in the BN held a meeting to seek consensus on the use of English in the teaching of Mathematics and Science in national-type schools.

The meeting, held at the Transport Ministry, was attended by leaders from MCA, Gerakan, the Sarawak United People's Party and the Sabah Progressive Party. (Liberal Democratic Party of Sabah was not represented at the meeting).

They however failed to reach any agreement on that day but on Saturday Gerakan president Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik announced the party's views and counter-proposals.

Opposing the move to implement the re-introduction of English as a medium of instruction in primary schools, 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 currently.

Lim's unilateral move drew sharp criticism from within the ruling coalition but Dr Mahathir said on Sunday that the Government was receptive to all counter-proposals provided that they are free from racial or religious connotations.

This led to the subsequent meeting between the Chinese-based parties and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Tuesday.

Abdullah had since briefed Dr Mahathir on the BN component parties suggestions and the Prime Minister is expected to call for a meeting with them, before eventually announcing a modified implementation method.