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Chinese-based parties fail to reach consensus on English

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PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - Chinese-based parties in the Barisan Nasional today failed to reach a consensus on the use of English in the teaching of Mathematics and Science in national-type schools.

Emerging from a one-hour meeting at the Transport Ministry, the leaders announced at a Press conference that "a search for consensus is still going on".

The only agreement reached by the four parties - MCA, Gerakan, Sabah Progressive Party and Sarawak United People's Party - was on appointing MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik as the spokesman at the Press conference.

With Dr Ling in the MCA team were deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek, vice-presidents Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and Datuk Fong Chan Onn and central committee member Datuk Hon Choon Kim.

Gerakan was represented by president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and vice-president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

Representing SAPP were treasurer-general Shim Paw Fatt, supreme council member Benny Low and Youth deputy head Victor Lim Kok Chung while secretary-general Datuk Sim Kheng Hui represented SUPP.

Today's MCA-initiated meeting was the third on the issue. The MCA had met with Gerakan and SUPP earlier and hoped to include another Chinese-based BN component party - the Liberal Democratic Party - in future meetings.

On whether the failure to reach a consensus meant the parties opposed the Government's plans or were just unhappy with its implementation, Dr Ling replied: "That is for you to guess".

To a question on the likelihood of the parties reaching a compromise, he said BN component parties had faced bigger hurdles before but were able to resolve them amicably.

Elaborating on the failure to reach a consensus today, Dr Ling said studies on several "necessary things" had yet to be completed.

"We are also looking into the world situation, in multi-ethnic societies in other countries."

Dr Ling said they decided to adopt a low profile in tackling the issue "as we want to take the emotion out of it".

"We do not want it to be politicised. We would rather look at it as an intellectual and academic subject. We want to do what is right and best for the children of the country."

On whether a deadline had been set for the parties to reach a decision, considering that the teaching of the two subjects in English was expected to commence next year, Dr Ling said the leaders felt they should not confine themselves to any time frame.

When it was pointed out that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had stated that all schools would be involved, he said:

"Let's do our work quietly without being instigated by the Press. We are not here to go into controversies. I will not be instigated by anybody. We are still discussing and searching for a consensus."

Meanwhile in Kuala Terengganu, Manan Osman and Sajahan Waheed report that when asked to comment on the meeting, Dr Mahathir said the matter had yet to be discussed in BN.

"If they want to discuss it, it is alright with us. We will wait and see

what their stand is."

On Vision Schools, the Prime Minister, who was on a one-day visit to the State, said he believed that such schools would be able to foster good relationships among students of various races.

"Some parents are just not interested to send their children to national schools as there is just too much politicking and segregation of students based on races," he said.