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Don't sensationalise issues, says DPM

Hamidah Atan; Firdaus Abdullah; Shahrum Sayuthi

PORT DICKSON, Sun. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today reminded people not to sensationalise issues without checking the facts as this could have far-reaching consequences for unity and security.

Speaking after closing the three-day Young Malay Intellectuals seminar, he said any action which threatened national integration and unity must be avoided at all costs.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, was asked to comment on Umno Youth's threat to lodge a police report against National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam if he did not apologise for accusing schools of racial segregation.

The movement's education bureau chief, Dr Adham Baba, was quoted as saying that the Home and Education Ministries should take action against Siva Subramaniam.

Abdullah also hoped that all quarters had accepted the report and were now convinced that there was no racial segregation in the school system.

"The Government will continue to work hard towards the education objective of unity. I hope all parties will understand the report which has been prepared by the Independent Committee on Segregation in Schools."

"Is it so hard to say 'I am sorry'," he asked.

Saying that he knew Siva Subramaniam well, Abdullah said he was prepared to meet him to discuss education issues.

Yesterday, Siva Subramaniam said the NUTP wanted to meet Abdullah to discuss education issues that have cropped up, including delay in constructing teachers' quarters and conflicting statements on teachers' annual leave.

A few days ago, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad announced the findings of the committee which dismissed allegations of segregation in schools.

Siva Subramaniam, who is also Cuepacs president, had submitted a memorandum to Musa, claiming racial segregation at 210 national schools in the country.

In Petaling Jaya, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Aziz Samsuddin said today the Education Ministry would take disciplinary action against Siva Subramaniam if he continued to question the findings of the committee.

"If they still dispute the findings they are not helping to unite the people... but to divide the community," he said.

The union had caused distress and unhappiness among 200 headmasters and school heads.

"Is it fair for this union to go on with such arrogance? I hope the public can understand our concern over unity in schools," he said after receiving Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base.

Defending demands from various quarters for an apology from the NUTP, he said the union should do so and drop the issue.

In Kota Tinggi, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said today NUTP had shown that it was insensitive to racial sentiments when it brought up the school segregation issue.

He said this was based on NUTP's statements over the issue which seemed to be aimed at gaining popularity rather than anything else.

"The wanton claims by NUTP on this issue have been proven to be

baseless, but they have affected the image of teachers and schools in this country. They (NUTP) need to learn a lesson out of what has happened," he said.

Hishammuddin was speaking after attending the Tenggara Umno divisional meeting at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Tenggara near here today.

Hishammuddin, who is also Tenggara Umno division chief, was commenting on a statement by Adham who said he would lodge a police report against Siva Subramaniam over the issue.

news@nstp.com.my

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