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DPM: Joint school activities good for harmony

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SERI KEMBANGAN, Fri. - Vernacular and national schools should hold joint activities to foster unity and racial harmony, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

Speaking to headmasters and schoolteachers at a public forum, he said they should consider holding joint programmes once or twice a year.

He noted that there was still suspicion and doubt about the Government's intentions to build Vision Schools, and suggested a more informal way of bringing schoolchildren of different races together.

"Why don't national schools and national-type schools in a district get their students together to form multi-racial teams to play games, have a sports day or go camping?"

"We face so many problems in trying to establish Vision Schools because people are suspicious about them. So why not bring the students together for activities? There is nothing wrong with this religiously or culturally," he said at the forum on Vision 2020 Revisited: Continuing with the Next Lap.

The forum was organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute and Tabung Pendidikan Hua, a publisher of primary and secondary educational books.

Abdullah also launched the Wawasan 2020 Education Book, a comic book explaining Vision 2020 for children. The book was published by Tabung Pendidikan Hua.

Later, Abdullah elaborated on his proposal to have joint activities for the schools.

"The practice of being together will help prevent racist attitudes. We should create linkages for students of different communities to be together," he said.

Present was Deputy Education Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin, who supported the idea, and said the ministry would discuss the suggestion.

"It sounds effective. But there is no need to make it compulsory for all schools. For a start, the schools can arrange joint activities on their own initiative," Aziz said.

Earlier, Abdullah stressed the importance of unity as a key to achieving Vision 2020, and reiterated his commitment to fulfilling it.

"I am as committed to Vision 2020 as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is. We must implement it more vigorously."

The public forum was held in conjunction with the 12th anniversary of the announcement of Vision 2020 by Dr Mahathir, who unveiled it on this date.

Asli chief executive officer Datuk Dr Michael Yeoh earlier proposed setting up a National Vision Consultative Council to oversee the country's progress in achieving Vision 2020.

Yeoh suggested that Abdullah chair the council which should comprise representatives of religious, ethnic and societal groups.

Abdullah said it was a matter for the Government to decide.