

05/01/2003

Malacca school's directive on `baju kurung' sparks protests

MALACCA, Sat. - Kota Melaka MP Kerk Kim Hock has asked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Education Ministry to intervene over a directive issued by a secondary school principal that all her students wear baju kurung to school every Friday.

Kerk, who is also DAP secretary-general, said although the principal of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Infant Jesus Convent, Datin Rahimah Ghazali, had said it would be implemented on a trial basis for the first three months, it would become a school regulation by April.

He said parents had complained to the Malacca DAP and its leaders over the matter as close to 60 per cent of the students there were non-Malays.

"Such measures are tantamount to the hijacking of the national school system, which if implemented, will be a turn-off for non-Malay parents. This effort will be seen by parents as an effort to transform it into a Malay school," he said.

The headmistress had said on Thursday, during orientation day, that all pupils would be required to wear baju kurung every Friday, with the first three months being on a trial basis.

Kerk said he would write to Dr Mahathir over this matter as the Prime Minister had also said in a recent interview with the New Straits Times that the idea to set up the national school was to cater to all races.

"In the past, there were no problems with girls wearing skirts or boys wearing shorts for games, but now, boys are forbidden from wearing shorts even for games.

"Such interpretation of Islam will put off the non-Malays," Dr Mahathir had said in the interview.

A parent, Joseph Sta Maria, said it was not that the parents did not want their children to wear baju kurung, but the cloth used for the blouse was transparent.

"It is all right for the Muslim students as they wear the tudung, but for the non-Muslim children they will feel exposed because of the white cloth used."