

## **Vernacular schools keep us apart, says Mahathir**

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**By Leven Woon**

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad is not impressed by the government's gesture to revive a Chinese independent school in Kuantan, saying the vernacular school system has in fact divided the country.

At a press conference after launching an essay competition in Putrajaya today, Mahathir implied that he was not in favour of reviewing policies on Chinese independent schools.

He said he believes that the medium of instruction in schools must always be the national language spoken by the original settlers.

"Our forefathers wanted so much to be inclusive of those who struggled for our independence. But they agreed on something which is keeping us apart," he said.

He was asked whether the government should allow the construction of Chinese independent schools and recognise the Unified Examination Certificate, which is recognised around the world but not in Malaysia.

Blaming the education system for undermining national unity, Mahathir said people keep raising issues of ethnic identity because they want to remain apart.

"They don't want to be in one country, they want to be three different entities. We cannot undo (what was decided in the past). But if you want to make it worse, then separate completely.

"Go back to the British time - have the Chinese in towns, Indians in estates, Malays in fishing villages," he said, mockingly.

Mahathir, who was prime minister for 22 years, warned the present government against a populist approach to policies.

"You must stick to principles. If you want to follow everything (in order) to be popular, you will go down to the drain," he said.

Mahathir said the recognition of Chinese independent schools could lead to Malaysians being divided into three groups, each speaking a different language.

"We can't even be together. Then we won't be able to understand one another despite being in one country," he added.

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