

Ong: My statement misinterpreted

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KUALA LUMPUR: Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Ong Tee Keat claimed yesterday his statement on the issue of funds for the repair of two schools in Johor had been twisted and misinterpreted by certain quarters.

"The person responsible for translating my statement should not have tried to be naughty and totally twisted what I said," he said.

Ong said it did not make any sense for him to say that government officers siphoned money from the repair works.

"I merely suggested there should be proper monitoring of how the funds are spent. It was the chairman of the school board who delivered the speech citing certain examples," he said.

Ong expressed sadness over Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein's reaction to his statement.

"What we see is a personal attack on me. It is unfair and saddening for me," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

Ong said he was disturbed and perturbed with the reaction. "I have never questioned the credibility of Hishammuddin," he said in

response to Hishammuddin's claim that he (Ong) had alleged that certain government officers had misappropriated allocations meant for the repair works at two schools in Muar.

Ong, who is an MCA vice-president, denied making statements, like out of RM30,000 allocation only RM5,000 was used, saying the issue was raised by the school board, and as the guest-of-honour at the function his reply to the query was merely an immediate response.

"As a politician, he (Hishammuddin) should understand. As the guest-of-honour, how can I tell them to wait for a while as I have to get clearance first?" asked Ong.

He said his response was to advise the school boards to lodge a report with the Education Ministry on the matter.

"I said it would also be a sin if the complaints are ignored and would amount to wasting the government's money which also happens to be the people's money.

"The statement has nothing to do with any race," he said.

On whether he would meet with Hishammuddin to clear the air, Ong said the ball is in Hishammuddin's court.

"It is not me to act on the matter. As far as I know he (Hishammuddin) had instructed his deputy to go to the school," he said.

"I was just giving my comments. Looks like it is best not to give comments," he said.

Ong said he would remember the issue for a long time.

"It is as though I have committed such a big sin. Something is just not right," he added.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Hon Choon Kim said only one of the 140 national-type Chinese schools (SJKC) had faced problems in repair works on the school building.

"As far as I know, there has been no complaint from other schools. I had also visited several schools previously but had not come across such problems.

"In fact, there were schools which wrote to the newspapers expressing their happiness over the repair works," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

Hon said the school concerned had received a special allocation for repair work including resolving the termite problem, and the work was completed eight months ago.

As such, he questioned why the problem faced by SJKC Kung Yu in Muar, Johor was being raised only now.