

# Speed up unity efforts, schools told

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Underlining its seriousness in wanting greater unity, the government yesterday ordered school administrators to speed up integration-related programmes.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Hon Choon Kim warned that the government would not brook any excuses, especially since it had allocated RM25.8 million for the Students Integration Plan for Unity (Rimup).

The government wants to create an environment where primary and secondary students mix freely and learn about each other's cultures and customs.

In the past, excuses were accepted because there were claims of insufficient funding for such programmes. But no more, Hon said.

There is a perception that racial divisions are widening. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other leaders have been urging people to think Malaysian.

The Rimup programme is another measure to strengthen the commonalities between the races.

Hon said the Rimup programme aimed at bringing students closer at various levels, including academic, games and sports, co-curricular activities, community service and activities to instil patriotism.

Rimup involves national and vernacular schools situated close to each other getting together to organise activities that allow students of different races to mix.

It was initiated in 1986 by Abdullah when he was education minister but it did not take off due to "logistical difficulties".

It was revived in July 2005, with participation from 1,387 primary and 540 secondary schools.

"Although in some places, the MPs were helping out in terms of financial resources, some schools said they could not run integration programmes because they did not have the money.

"Now that the allocation is

there, we will not accept any excuse. Headmasters, teachers, parent-teacher associations, state assemblymen, society and students themselves must help to promote programmes under Rimup."

Speaking after chairing a Rimup Committee meeting at here, Hon said about RM2.4 million would be spent training 9,938 teachers and ministry officials and RM8.4 million would go towards the implementation of the newly designed e-integration project.

Under e-integration, students from different schools can interact online with each other.

"In areas where we cannot group them together, we will put them under this (e-inte-

gration).

"We want them to know each other and learn about other people's cultures and customs. This way, we hope our children can integrate better for continued peace and stability."

Hon said at the primary school level, 1,387 such groups had been formed while more than 4,400 schools would be running Rimup programmes on their own.

He said 540 groups of secondary schools had been created while the number of schools which would run their own Rimup programmes was close to 900.

"We want all schools in the country to participate. The programmes they hold must

help achieve the objective of promoting integration among the schoolchildren."

Hon said the committee yesterday decided that two major programmes be held to further promote Rimup in conjunction with the country's 50th Independence day.

"An assembly of leaders and students will be held for five days in August in Perak, while an integration camp for primary school children will be held in Johor in June."

Hon said Rimup committees had been formed at school and district levels, and these were required to submit reports on the progress of the programmes from time to time.