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'We will help Tamil schools'

Najib: Vernacular languages encouraged and will be supported

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KUALA LUMPUR: The use of vernacular languages, especially in the education system, is encouraged in line with the national intention to promote multicultural and multilingual policies, said the Prime Minister.

To the Indian community, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said: "All necessary assistance will be provided by the Government to the community to ensure their language and culture will flourish."

He added that Malaysian students could learn Tamil from the pre-school level right up to tertiary level.

Currently, there are 523 Tamil primary schools in the Malaysian education system.

"Tamil language and literature are also taught in secondary schools, and students can pursue undergraduate and post-graduate studies in Tamil language and literature at public universities," he said when launching the 9th International Conference on Tamil Studies at Universiti Malaya here yesterday.

The conference brings together 1,500 scholars in Tamil studies from South Asia, North America, Europe and Australasia.

On the subject of education, Najib said next year would mark 200 years since the establishment of Tamil vernacular schools in Malaysia, a milestone for the Indian community.

"In April this year, a new Tamil



Surrounded: Najib at the opening of the Tamil studies conference at Dewan Tunku Canselor in Universiti Malaya.

primary school in Lunas will begin operations. "The Government has also approved the setting up of six new Tamil primary schools," he said.

Najib also acknowledged the contributions of the Indian community to the nation's progress, and said the community had also progressed in line with Malaysia's growth.

"For example, Malaysian Indians make up 11.1% of professionals in the country. Many in the legal and medical professions are from the Indian community.

"There are also many towering figures from the community who

have made significant contributions and achievements in education, business and sports," he said.

Najib, who also chairs the Cabinet committee on the Indian community, said the Government had started many initiatives for the community's benefit.

"Malaysian Indians are the sons and daughters of this soil and we will ensure they continue to progress and safeguard their language and culture," he said.

Speaking to reporters after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting later, Najib said all the fac-

tions in MIC have agreed to respect the moratorium proposed by him to allow him and his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to think of the best way to resolve the party's crisis.

Najib said MIC is an important component of Barisan Nasional.

"We need an MIC which is strong and which can help us in all aspects," he said.

However he declined to comment on whether removing MIC president Datuk Seri G. Palanivel was among the option being considered.

"We have to look first at what is the best formula." he said.