

Chinese schools here to stay, says Najib
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 — Chinese vernacular education is guaranteed under the Barisan Nasional (BN) government, Datuk Seri Najib Razak vowed tonight following recent accusations from Chinese educationists that his administration was conspiring to end the use of Mandarin as a medium of instruction.

The prime minister also said on ntv7's Mandarin talk show, "Chat Time With...", that his administration was committed to ending the teacher shortage in Chinese primary schools and would consider recognising the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), the Chinese school's SPM equivalent.

"It (vernacular education) is provided for in the (Federal) Constitution that parents have the right to choose. I don't think there is any need or cause for Malaysian Chinese to fear that we will close down Chinese schools.

"If we didn't amend the Act, maybe there could be a reason. But the amendment is a clear manifestation of our commitment that Chinese schools are here to stay and education in Chinese schools is an integral part of the national education system," Najib said, referring to the 1996 amendment to the Education Act when he was education minister.

The amendment had removed the controversial Section 21 (2), which stipulated that the minister could convert a vernacular school into a Malay-medium school. The section also specifically provided for vernacular education as part of the national education system.

"It once and for all removed fear about (the) future and survival of Chinese schools... it was a landmark decision we made," he said on live on national television.

Vernacular education has been a longstanding issue, with Chinese educationists accusing the government of sidelining Chinese education for the past four decades despite being fully aware of the shortcomings.

During its March 25 rally, the United Chinese School Committees Association (Dong Zong) accused the government of compromising Chinese education by "deliberately" not training enough Chinese school teachers, resulting in a shortage that has lasted for up to 40 years.

Dong Zong president Yap Sin Tian told a crowd of over 5,000, who had chanted for MCA's Deputy Education Minister Datuk Wee Ka Siong to resign, this was so the government could send in those without SPM Mandarin qualifications to fill the gap.

The MCA Youth chief was forced to defend himself last week by insisting that, when he joined the Education Ministry in 2009, there had been a shortage of 4,991 teachers in Chinese schools. This has been reduced each year to 1,870 this year, Wee added.

Najib also said tonight he was aware that "little Napoleons" in the government were a stumbling block towards solving Chinese education problems such as the shortage of

teachers.

"We are aware of that... we have made a commitment... to see to it this problem is addressed once and for all," the Umno president said.

Asked if the government would now give accreditation to the UEC since it recently recognised 146 universities from China, he said "we need to engage both sides" to discuss to what extent the curriculum can be made to be more Malaysian and the need for teachers to be proficient in Malay.

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