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THE choice of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language is a very real attempt at unifying the various races in Malaysia, said Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamed.

Dr. Mahathir, a former Umno leader, said this will give the people a national identity and a sense of solidarity.

He was speaking to members of the University of Malaya Graduates Society on National Unity — Myth or Reality.

He regretted many people had alleged that he was a racist, although he had done much for the Chinese.

"I have found jobs for

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat.

many non-Malays, signed letters of guarantee for many of those who went overseas and recommended many for further studies abroad," he said.

"Out of the 10 scholarships given to students out of my own pocket in my father's name, nine have gone to Chinese."

A barrier

Dr. Mahathir said the principles of the Rukunegara were not a good basis to work on in building up national unity.

"The principles are lofty and of tremendous worth in themselves. But certain sections of the community look on the Rukunegara as an essentially Malay idea," he said.

"This has built up a barrier against its successful impact."

However, he said, the Rukunegara could be very effective for the next generation if the teachers of the next generation dedicated themselves in all genuineness to teaching its principles to their pupils.

But at present, there was no feeling of oneness among the people, and for the moment national unity was but a myth.

National unity could be created by giving the people a common language and common culture.

Most practical

Malay as the national language would have a very deep impact on Malaysia's culture, making it Malay-based but with Indian and Chinese cultural influences being very dominant.

He said Malay was the most practical language in the context of the nation's needs.

The English language had never been a national language here. It has been spoken by only a few Malays who were lucky enough to get into the civil service, a few Chinese who went to English medium schools and the few Indians who became professionals.

Widely used

"English never penetrated the kampongs or a vast proportion of the Chinese and Indian communities.

Chinese or the Indian languages could not be used as the national language because both were diverse — there were several Chinese and Indian dialects and they were spoken relatively by very few.

Malay, on the other hand, was spoken even by a Tamil when talking to a Punjabi. It had been spoken by a strong community of Malacca Chinese before the British arrived and the British took it over as a prestige language.

Malay was most widely used, in day-to-day life, in the commercial sector. It had been adopted by the Indonesians as their national language.