

PM: Review states' powers

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants a review of the special powers of Sabah and Sarawak under the 20-point Federation of Malaysia agreement.

The Prime Minister said certain powers enjoyed by the two state governments were merely temporary and they should be re-examined.

Dr Mahathir said under the agreement reached when Malaysia was formed in 1963, a review ought to be made every 10 years with the aim of strengthening national integration.

"But because they were not very keen (for a review), we did not do anything about it," he said after opening the Bukit

Kiara Equestrian and Country Resort yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said that after 35 years of independence, it was time for the Government to find ways to forge the integration of the people.

The Federal Government, Dr Mahathir said, was not trying to take over the powers of these states as they had been well-defined.

"We should not be too unduly concerned over the powers between the federal and state governments as we are one country," he said.

The Prime Minister's call came in the wake of a demand by Umno Youth to review the powers of the two state governments, including their autonomy on immigration.

Last week, Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak

said a review could be made of the laws, regulations and conditions vested with the two state governments.

Najib said as far as he knew, a review had not been made for a long time.

The Sabah Government under the PBS had recently imposed a law requiring Malaysians from other states entering Sabah to produce passports.

Dr Mahathir hoped the Sabah Government would find a way to resolve the matter, saying there was no such restriction on Sabahans in the peninsula.

He said there were Sabahans who even owned newspaper companies, adding that there was no reason for them to feel suspicious about national integration.

On a PBS call to treat the

coming Sabah state election as a referendum, Dr Mahathir said it was unnecessary.

He said the party should not resort to a parochial approach in its campaign by adopting the **Sabah for Sabahans** line.

Dr Mahathir asked what was the point in adopting such an election campaign if it later led to racial tension.

PBS vice-president Datuk Zaki Haji Gusmiah had said the next state election should be regarded as a referendum and an "alternative" to a review of the 20-point agreement.

He said if there was a review it should take into account the wishes of the Sabah people.

"If the PBS wins the election, the review should be withdrawn. Then we should find ways to further strengthen the agreement," he said.