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Dr M concerned over racial polarisation

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed concern at racial polarisation in housing estates, schools and institutions of higher learning, fearing that the Government's aim of fostering better relations among the races may be defeated.

The Prime Minister, in stressing that there would be no assimilation of any race, said the country should at least integrate the races through school placements without affecting their vernacular status.

"This is a moderate approach," he said when opening the Gerakan National Delegates Conference 2000.

"The schools are still (racially) separated, only assemblies and sports meets are conducted together. It is utterly sad when this is made into a racial issue and there is aggressive opposition."

Saying that the Government had no intention of abolishing the uniqueness of pre-schools and national-type schools, Dr Mahathir pointed out that no country in the world permitted its immigrant citizenry to set up vernacular schools.

He also said if the national and national-type schools were divided until its students could not socialise at all, "can we sustain the harmony between the races as it is now?"

Saddened at the racial polarisation in universities, Dr Mahathir lamented that when attempts were made to place students together in a hostel, there was strong opposition on the grounds that this was "disturbing" to the students.

"The real world," he said, "forces us to meet and interact with other races. If we do not meet people of other races, it is certain that we cannot foster a meaningful relationship with them."

Dr Mahathir related how some government students sent to study abroad would not socialise with the locals there and would live exclusively with students from their provincial States.

"Kelantan people with Kelantan people, Kedah people with Kedah people," he said.

"If the objective of sending these students to study abroad is to expand their viewpoints," he said, "perhaps this would not be achieved because basically, they are still entrenched in their own States."

In a speech sprinkled with challenges against and posers for racial harmony, Dr Mahathir pointed to the creation of new settlements that stemmed from a population rise which inevitably created new schools and posed this question.

"What is wrong," he asked, "if schools from alternative streams are placed in a single campus so that students from various races can be close together?"

"Do the citizens of this country wish to witness the next generation unable to know each other while in school?"

Rating as satisfactory the state of racial harmony, Dr Mahathir said more early efforts must be made to foster racial ties, particularly on living in the same housing estate.

He described as unhealthy the races which lived in separate housing estates and even healthier if one race lived in luxury while the other stayed in low-cost or squatter homes.

In this respect, Dr Mahathir urged housing and new settlement developers to ensure that all races live and do business together in their housing

projects.

"Allocation of houses and shophouses must be fair," he said. "The Government is making efforts that this goal is achieved through the 'Prosper' project."

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