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More needs to be done to curb polarisation

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ALL Malaysians share the sentiments of Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's timely observations and anxiety over the rise in racial polarisation in our institutions of education and higher education.

If unchallenged, this phenomenon will certainly entrench itself and drive a wedge between Malaysia's multi-racial population and threaten the security of the nation.

Dr Mahathir's comments could not have come at a better time.

Our Prime Minister's concern is shared by many.

The cornerstone of his vision to create a modern Malaysia by 2020 is dependent on a need to foster a Bangsa Malaysia which puts the nation before race and religion.

In recent months, anti-Government and smear campaigns filled with unsubstantiated allegations with the aim of creating hatred have continued unchallenged.

Even pre-school children have not been spared from the "hate campaign" being carried out by certain quarters with a hidden political agenda.

It is also true that almost daily there are various anti-Government smear campaigns which, if left unaddressed, will create irreversible problems in the Malaysian community.

While these thoughts and allegations gained unprecedented exposure in the various websites, little has been done to address, challenge and combat these lies.

As such, the Government's plans to establish "vision schools" must be lauded as it will foster greater rapport between the different races at primary school level as they share the school campus and come together in extra-curricular activities.

However, this is not enough, it is also important that those chosen to teach in these schools must also be selected with great care and scrutiny.

If those selected to run these institutions are not competent and do not share a common philosophy to address and destroy any forms of racial polarisation and religious extremism - this entire programme like other similar attempts before them in the late 70s and 80s will be a failure.

It is therefore pertinent, therefore, that this task which has national security implications for the future be not left solely with the Ministry of Education but a specialised task force be selected to assist in the planning, co-ordination and management of this nationwide programme under the Prime Minister's Department.

It is accepted that there has been no formal study on racial polarisation in our institutions of education and higher education but one remembers that anecdotal evidence does suggest that the divide between Malay students and non-Malay students has grown wider.

Since racial polarisation will threaten the multi-racial fabric and politics of the Barisan Nasional Government which has led this nation successfully since 1957, every effort must be made to check this threat.