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When can Bangsa Malaysia be realised if racial divide exists?

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OUR Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said recently that Malaysia needed integration so that all races could stay and live together and understand each other. I totally agree with him.

Five decades ago, the word integration was hardly used. It was just mixing together and that was enough to bring all ethnic groups together, especially in schools.

I am the product of a government English (boys) school then, where 90 per cent of the students were Malays. The rest were Chinese, Indians and Eurasians.

There was no problem in mixing with each other. The atmosphere throughout school life was friendly and cordial. There was support all round regardless of race in sports and school work.

I wish to illustrate further the friendly atmosphere then. We could simply call each other "Hoi Cina/India/Orang Putih" (Eurasians due to their western names) or "Apa Melayu?" Sometimes, we even joked about each other's religions.

Not only could we do it then in school, we did that even during our working life. No one took offence at such name-calling or jokes. Why can't the same be done today?

Everything said can be sensitive. The reason is we have become very sensitive people in these times.

Recently, I bumped into an old classmate. He was with his family members. He is a grandfather now with three lovely grandchildren. I walked close to him and called softly, "Hoi Cina". He turned around and immediately recognised me. We shook hands and inquired about each other's well-being.

Now let us reflect on this for a little while. We had not seen each other for nearly 25 years. His immediate recognition of an old friend due to the "Hoi Cina" brought back fond memories of yesteryears.

We had a lot in common those days. Unity, whether conscious or otherwise, had been in existence. Helping and encouraging each other in school work and games was without doubt a part of it. Visiting the homes of classmates during festivals and also sick friends was a common activity.

Now after Merdeka, instead of becoming closer, we see a divide so prominent. This has prompted the Government to promote racial integration by setting up the Vision schools.

Are Vision schools the answer to narrowing the divide? We have to ask ourselves what caused this divide and why.

Five decades ago, this was non-existent. Why now? Today, if Malaysians of various races cannot sit down together over a cup of teh tarik and enjoy the jokes and name-callings like the good old days, when then can Bangsa Malaysia see the light of day?