

# Teachers tell why polarity takes place

By S. INDRAMALAR  
and GAVIN GOMEZ

PETALING JAYA: The inability to communicate comfortably in a common language is one factor for polarity in national schools, several educators said yesterday.

Students tend to group together along racial lines because they feel inadequate communicating with others especially if they come from vernacular primary schools.

"Students from vernacular schools tend to be weak in Bahasa Malaysia and this hampers their ability to communicate," said a secondary school teacher in the Klang Valley.

She was commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Monday that the education system had failed to promote racial integration.

On Monday, Dr Mahathir said the Government would review the present education system. Among the

**STAR** 18 APR 2001  
weaknesses—the Prime Minister cited was that the overemphasis on religion had deterred many non-Malay students from enrolling in national schools.

The teacher, however, disagreed with his comment. "I don't think this is a problem as Islam is a religion that preaches values which are in line with Malaysian practices. There might be a problem in implementation though," said the teacher.

A secondary school headmistress agreed the problem lay with the way education policies are carried out.

"The education system is fine. After all, it is basically the same system that has worked for many of us who are teachers now. The problem I think lies with the implementation of it at school level."

Methodist Education Council secretary Goh Keat Seng said: "The objective (of having schools foster racial integration) has to be measured against implementation.

"Mission schools have always had

a good mix of different ethnic groups and unity has been the focus through the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and the cultivation of values."

Goh said the responsibility for national unity was not solely in the hands of schools as students only spent a part of their day there.

"Schools can only foster national unity up to a point. It has to be sustained after school hours and for this to happen, society has to play a role too."

Teacher Ramani Nathan believes that the education system below tertiary level was fine, but felt a review was necessary at the tertiary level.

"If we are talking about racial segregation, this is more apparent at university level mainly because of the quota system.

"If you walk into any public university, you will find clear cases of racial segregation where there is very little communication between the races outside the classroom."