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Fostering unity among students

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - A commission should be set up to determine how the education system can be reformed to be more effective in fostering racial unity, social activist Datuk Lee Lam Thye said.

He said input should be gleaned from government agencies, non-governmental organisations, educators and parents.

"The commission should also find out to what extent the current system has succeeded in fostering racial integration among students."

Lee said the problem now was a lack of interaction among students of different races.

"I believe the current education system should remain as it is. This means we should continue having national and national-type schools. However, more programmes must be formulated to bring about interaction among students."

He said teachers, too, must play their role and help promote interaction among students of different races.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the education system had not been able to achieve the desired results where national integration was concerned. He said the Government would study the weaknesses in the education system which had resulted in some parents not sending their children to national schools.

National Union of Tamil School Teachers president Shahul Hamid Mydin Shah also defended national-type schools.

Although many have said that national-type schools prevent integration among the races, they must realise that integration problems were prevalent mainly at secondary schools and universities, he said. "Primary school children do not have such problems. They happily mix with each other."

The weakness in the education system, Shahul Hamid said, was mostly due to the fact that Tamil and Chinese schools did not get enough funding.

Although the Education Act was amended in 1995 and guaranteed the existence of Tamil and Chinese schools, they did not get enough facilities. He said that of the 520 Tamil schools in the country, 360 were only partially aided.

"These schools lack proper facilities like a library, canteen and toilets. Improving these facilities is usually left in the hands of teachers and parents."

He said if more funding was given to these schools, they would be better able to contribute to the nation's development.