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Zaharah-Tension

PM ASKS PANEL TO CHECK INCLINATION TO INFLAME RACIAL TENSION

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked the National Unity Advisory Panel to correct society's inclination to dwell on disputes that can subsequently develop into issues that inflame racial tension.

According to National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, the prime minister gave the panel this task when he met panel members at the Prime Minister's Department here today.

Briefing reporters on the meeting later, Siti Zaharah, who chairs the panel, said the prime minister would like to see corrective measures be taken to remove prolonged obstacles to national unity.

"If necessary, we shall have to organise dialogues with key segments of society such as university students, academicians at tertiary institutions and media practitioners on the importance of national unity to national development," she said.

According to her, Dr Mahathir also tasked the panel with improving society's understanding of religions so as to rejuvenate and enhance tolerance among the followers of the various faiths in the country.

According to her, during the two-hour meeting with the 43-member panel, Dr Mahathir cited examples to illustrate society's current misconceptions about religions and diminishing tolerance especially among school students and undergraduates.

The prime minister, according to her, lamented that unlike in the old days when students of the various races could share a room and yet perform their religious obligations, present day students even refused to share rooms.

Siti Zaharah said the panel would review the prevailing situation and take appropriate measures to check undesirable and divisive elements from exploiting misconceptions to fan deeper intolerance.

In response to the prime minister's advice, she said the panel would intensify programmes to educate the younger generation on preserving racial co-existence and religious tolerance as well as on the social contract agreed upon by Malaysia's founding fathers.

The panel would conduct a series of national surveys to gauge the level of national unity to form the basis for the corrective measures required, she said.

"We shall have to conduct national and comparative surveys to determine reasons giving rise to the diminishing tolerance," she added.

-- BERNAMA

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