

A lecture students should **STAR 15 AUG 2002** remember

It was a lecture none of the first batch of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman students would have wanted to miss. It was probably one they will remember for the rest of their lives. After all, it was the Prime Minister himself delivering that lecture, writes **FOONG PEK YEE**.

SHARING the same enthusiasm were hundreds of Kolei Tunku Abdul Rahman students at the Setapak campus, where the official opening of Utar was held on Tuesday.

Befitting the academic occasion, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was about to deliver a message that would have an impact on their lives as future leaders in the country - the importance of racial integration.

"Education must be holistic. It must result in a rounded man, a man who is not merely an expert in a particular subject but who is able to relate to the society he is in," said the Prime Minister.

Datuk Prof Lam Sai Kit, who had lectured in Universiti Malaya for 36 years, said it was regrettable that students in higher learning institutes tended to keep among those of the same ethnic background

He attributed this to several factors, adding that such groupings acted as a type of "comfort zone" and not unusual when the percentage of students of different ethnic groups varied.

Such groupings, he observed, was also an intra-ethnic problem - also based on their dialect or the state they came from

As such, Prof Lam said, any proposal to bring them together would certainly help, adding that the inter-racial clubs proposed by Dr Mahathir was a good idea.

Such clubs should not be structured and students should be given a free hand to set them up and run them, he said.

"When given a free hand, the students will not abuse it," he said, adding that integration was something to be nurtured and not imposed upon, added Prof Lam, a Utar International Advisory Council (IAC) member and one of the most influential figures in medical virology in South-East Asia.

Among the 2,000 people who listened to Dr Mahathir's lecture were prominent academicians, both locally and abroad, including six of the nine IAC members and MCA grassroots leaders.

Tan Sri Dr Augustine Ong Soon Hock was optimistic that Utar could be a good platform for racial integration in years to come.

The increasing importance of acquiring knowledge and skills and globalisation would overshadow the general perception of it being Chinese-based, Dr Ong, also an IAC member, pointed out.

There would certainly be non-Chinese students, including bumi-

putras, who would want to take up Chinese studies or learn the Chinese way of management.

Utar's only bumiputra student, Yanti Heryani Puteri Emrizal Bujang, is a fine example.

Yanti, a journalism student, has taken up Mandarin because it is a prerequisite for the course and Yanti took up the challenge because she knew very well that a third language, especially Mandarin, would be an asset.

Drawing an analogy, Dr Ong said there were many non-Chinese pupils in Chinese primary schools and this could be a pool of potential Utar students later.

Dr Ong, the recipient of the First Asian Achievement Award in 1992, said IAC would help set the direction for Utar and that the next five years would be a crucial and testing time for the university.

The awareness of the importance of knowledge, transcending racial barriers! is also on the rise among Malaysians who are giving priority to their children's education.

Perhaps Khalid Rahman, a driver, whose employer is Chinese, is convinced of the need for racial harmony and understanding of the positive traits and values of each other. Both his children are in a Chinese primary school in Selangor.

"I sent them to Chinese kindergartens and let them choose whether to go to Chinese schools.

"They wanted to continue studying in a Chinese primary school," said Khalid.

Khalid said he and his wife coached their children in Bahasa Malaysia at home.

Khalid and Yanti are encouraging examples of racial harmony at its best - assimilation without giving up one's identity.

Perhaps Utar could also vie for the award for inter-racial clubs as proposed by Dr Mahathir for those who have done a good job in setting up and running such clubs to promote racial integration.

In the end, the biggest beneficiary will be Malaysians themselves.