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The bigger issue must be to address promotion of racial integration

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NOW Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself has advised everyone to stop further highlighting the issue of racial segregation in schools.

Will the nation see an end or at least a decline in the barrage of criticisms and threats of legal suits against the National Union of Teaching Profession and its secretary-general Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam?

Hopefully it does.

Otherwise, it is a truly sad day for Malaysians as the issue is not about who is right or who is wrong.

It is, after all, an issue about the shaping of the future generation and nation as a whole.

All quarters should by now be asking: what is the issue at hand; is there racial segregation in schools or not?

Since the findings by the Independent Committee on Segregation in Schools which, among others, dismissed the allegations, the nation should heave a sigh of relief.

Instead, the committee's findings became a justification for those whose schools were identified as practising segregation, to, apart from lambasting Siva Subramaniam and NUTP, threaten legal action.

A succinct quote from Dr Mahathir yesterday should help these people to start using some of their grey matter.

When asked to comment on the intention of two headmasters to file a RM1 million defamation suit against NUTP and Siva Subramaniam, Dr Mahathir said:

"It is more as an attempt to get money out of it and should not be pursued."

Many may not agree but how can it be anything else.

After all, what was needed from the beginning is for Siva Subramaniam to apologise for making a baseless allegation.

If these headmasters, teachers and parents stick to that, then their grounds are legitimate.

And if Siva Subramaniam refuses to apologise, despite being proven by the findings of the committee, then it is up to society to judge him.

But to threaten with a million ringgit suit is definitely not an attempt to correct what is wrong.

At best, apart from making money, the act smacks of vindictiveness.

Since these people are so bent in punishing someone, they should probably cast their net wider and include others who had made the allegations earlier than Siva Subramaniam and NUTP.

After all, the one to have actually started the ball rolling was MIC Youth Education Bureau chairman Murugesu Sinnandavar when he alleged that there was racial segregation in Sekolah Kebangsaan Pelabuhan Kelang.

If those planning to sue NUTP and Siva Subramaniam pursued similar intents with Murugesu, they may probably also increase their spoils to RM2 million.

That established and while the concern parties scurry around for lawyers to represent them, they should also start looking for those who opposed efforts for racial integration in schools.

Why don't they start to be more real and search deep into their conscience on how the education fraternity had not been able to promote racial integration.

It was pointed out how even university students opposed racial integration programmes in higher educational institutions.

Apart from the students, political parties, including those which loudly proclaim themselves to be multiracial but at the same time defend the need for vernacular schools.

No doubt, vernacular schools are guaranteed in a constitutional provision. But at the same time, these same groups opposed efforts for the Vision Schools.

Vision Schools, no matter which way they are perceived, are aimed at promoting integration.

However, Vision Schools are viewed suspiciously, used as an issue in by-elections to serve the interest of political parties claiming to be multiracial.

The question at hand is while these quarters which are unhappy over NUTP and Siva Subramaniam's allegations of racial segregation in school, they did not seem concerned when Vision Schools or other efforts towards racial integration in educational institutions were attacked.

It is one thing to defend oneself of not practising racial segregation. But to keep mum when efforts for racial integration is under attack can also be interpreted as wanting racial segregation to persist.

Surely, these quarters must be aware that efforts to mix Malay and non-Malay students in dormitories in a public university were opposed, not only by the students but also by their parents and politically-linked individuals.

None came forward to support the proposal or share ideas of how it can be achieved.

Another contradiction which crops up from this is, if there is no racial segregation, why the need to give attention to racial integration.

Obviously, efforts for racial integration come about because there is racial segregation in schools, whether they were committed deliberately or otherwise.

As such, the bigger issue here is how to address the racial segregation and not who is right or wrong.

It must be lonely for NUTP and Siva Subramaniam in facing the barrage of attacks for opening their mouth at the wrong time and the wrong place.

That loneliness should however be shared by the likes of MIC's Murugesu.

If he was still in school, Murugesu and the likes would have probably been told to do this:

"Those who agree, put up your hand."

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