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Polarisation among races can affect unity

LEMBAH PANTAI, Sun. - Despite the low number of racial conflicts, the polarisation between different races could lead to a lower level of tolerance and harmony in the future, National Unity Department director-general Datuk Abdul Rashid Sa'ad said today.

He said according to the department's statistics on conflicts recorded between 1996 and 2002 nationwide, only eight were racially motivated with the others mostly related to politics.

"Even though the number of racial conflicts is very low, we cannot take this for granted. It has to be addressed before we reach a point where rifts can be easily triggered," he said after opening the Pertandingan Pidato Muhibah Antara IPTA at Universiti Malaya.

The elocution contest between public universities was specially organised by the National Unity Department and Universiti Malaya to promote unity between the races.

Abdul Rashid said the department would promote other programmes to foster inter-racial unity, like the social outreach programme and unity clubs in schools and universities nationwide.

The social outreach programme, he said, would give a chance to students to meet leaders from governmental and non-governmental organisations and discuss the realities affecting their communities.

In line with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to address the polarisation issue, he said there would be similar elocution contests in private universities as well as quizzes based on unity.

In today's event, four universities took part in the contest which saw elocutors speaking on the beauty and uniqueness of the different races.

Universiti Islam Antarabangsa won the first prize of RM2,000, followed by Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Mara.