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Multi-racial clubs on campus (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Government is urging university students to set up multi-racial clubs on campus, and offering incentives to those most innovative in fostering better race relations.

In an effort to arrest deteriorating relations among students of different races, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the proposed clubs with leaders and members of all races should conduct courses on the customs, taboos and sensitivities of each race.

"Members must deliberately and consciously avoid conflict, especially those based on racial differences," he said at the launching of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Utar).

"Every university should have multi-racial clubs which would enable students of different races to mingle socially, in sporting activities and educational outings in the country or abroad."

Dr Mahathir said relations between students of different races were deteriorating "when in fact they should be getting better with time".

"We have tried (to improve the situation) via the national education system, but clearly this has been unsuccessful because there are those who abuse existing policies to create wider rifts between the races."

Noting that the Government had introduced various means to foster racial integration, such as by encouraging students of different races to share accommodation, Dr Mahathir said, however, that there were "no positive efforts in this direction at universities".

"The university students are now keeping to their own race, they don't live together in the same dormitory, they sit apart in the lecture theatres, in the playing fields, and during co-curricular activities."

This, he said, was an unhealthy situation and was dangerous to the country's future.

"The reality is that when they leave the university to work, they will meet a multi-racial society that is different from that in the university."

According to the Prime Minister, the managements of universities had not made sufficient efforts to foster racial integration.

"Sometimes it is the university staff themselves who try to create a gulf between the races. They use religion as an excuse to keep the races apart."

With the high cost of private higher education, Dr Mahathir said economic realities would likely cause private universities to be populated by one race and public higher educational institutions by another.

This, he said, would compound the difficulties of fostering racial integration.

"As it is, racial polarisation already exists at primary and secondary schools.

"If this were allowed to progress to university level, it will become increasingly obvious in the adult population."

Malaysians, he said, were fortunate as their leaders were used to mingling among the races.

Stressing that efforts must be made to ensure university students mingled, Dr Mahathir said he was aware that while "you can take a horse to the water, you cannot make it drink".

Nevertheless, the Prime Minister said: "Take it to the water you must. We will find a way to make it drink."

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir, replying to a question on whether the Government had resolved the controversy surrounding the proposal to teach Science and Mathematics in English at Chinese and Tamil schools, said Barisan Nasional would solve the problem.

"We can settle this our way. We have resolved worse problems than this."

Saying that the Government was committed to teaching Science and Mathematics in English, Dr Mahathir said the decision was neither political nor intended to undermine the culture and identity of the other races. On those opposing the move, he said: "We have our ways (to deal with them)."

He said that factions demanding that the identity of their races not be adversely affected would only lead to other groups making the same demands.

"When all parties remain stubborn and set aside the interests of the country, the unity and harmony that we have nurtured all this while will be destroyed."

On Pas' criticism of the move, Dr Mahathir said: "When we want to do something good, Pas will politicise it and then influence the people to go against it."

Dr Mahathir advised Utar to attract as many Bumiputera students as it could, as well as offer courses of high quality.

The MCA-initiated Utar comprises five faculties and an Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research. Eight courses are being offered to its first batch of students.