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Open minds

THE latest stinging rebuke from the Prime Minister directed at Malaysian students in Cairo to be more "liberal-minded" carried an undertone of weary but troubled resignation. This is understandable since previous admonitions seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

As Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad rightly pointed out, if this were the case, they "might as well stay at home and learn their religion there because they were not learning anything in Egypt". Even the Egyptians can't believe their blinkeredness and insularity.

The whole idea of studying abroad is to broaden one's horizons, to experience different cultures, gain fresh perspectives, and be invigorated by new modes of thinking. But too many Malaysian students going abroad not only to the Middle East, but also to the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, fail to benefit from the opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges. This is because when they get there, they frequently live in Malaysian "ghettos", minimising their exposure to and interaction with the host society.

Indoctrination by political parties is partly responsible for this unhappy state of affairs among the Malays. However, the closed minds of Malaysian students at home and abroad are also the products of a school system too long dominated by narrow-minded members of the education establishment. The extreme manifestations of Islam have been drummed into their heads from the day they step into school. Schools must be liberated from their pernicious influence before the minds of the students can be freed.