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Schools really have been 'hijacked'

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I READ with great interest Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's exclusive interview with the New Straits Times (NST, Dec 26).

He lamented that the school system had been hijacked (presumably by those bent on promoting Islam) and that Islamic practices had been introduced into the school system to the extent that the non-Muslims have been alienated.

He plans to overhaul the national education system. I wish him success.

It seems to me, all this while, everybody's idea of a school was that it is a factory to produce certificate holders with straight As. Nobody talks

of what values are being instilled, how the teachers are "leading" the students, how the schools promote esprit de corps, and so on.

I am a Malay girl, and I left school three years ago. From my experience, I can confirm what the Prime Minister said: The Islamic group has taken control of the schools.

I went to a big girls school with nearly 2,000 students. I think Malay girls made up just about half the number. The rest were Chinese and Indians. We had three ustazah. According to them, everything was either haram or halal, but mostly haram.

Because they were the ustazah, and spoke in the name of the Quran nobody dared to argue or to reason with them. Worse still, the non-Muslims, including the headmistress, listened to them blindly. Otherwise, they would risk being labelled anti-Islam.

A few incidents that happened when I was in Form Five are still fresh in my memory.

I was one of the seven Malay girls in a class of 43 students.

There were more than 100 teachers in the school, I think; a majority of them Malays. All except two wore tudung. I noticed that the Malay teachers kept to themselves, seldom mixing with the Chinese or Indian teachers.

I was selected to play hockey for the school. One morning the ustazah, my Islamic teacher, admonished me for wearing shorts and for not wearing a headscarf. This is what she actually said: Kalau kamu pakai seluar pendek lagi, saya doakan kamu supaya gagal dalam peperiksaan ("If you keep wearing shorts, I will pray that you fail in your examinations").

To this day I get the chills when I recall that someone was praying to Allah that I would fail my exams; and that the person doing this was my ustazah.

Others told me that she told other classes about the "bad things" that

I

did. I was a bad example to others. I could not believe an ustazah would go on a smear campaign.

According to her, I was un-Islamic in that I had too many friends who were Chinese. She asked me to avoid them because they were a bad influence.

Thirty of my 43 classmates were Chinese girls. Two were and still are great friends. They used to sleep over at my house, and my parents pampered them more than their own daughter, I think.

Another incident concerns a birthday party. One day, a girl was showing her friends photos of her birthday party. Our geography teacher, a disciple of the ustazah, picked up a photo that had fallen on the floor. Then she demanded to see the rest of the photos.

The next thing we knew, the ustazah called me and five other Malay girls to her desk and bawled us out for attending the birthday party. It was haram because there were boys present. To this day I find it difficult to understand why birthday parties are haram.

Another incident involves the Form Five farewell party. We were going to have our party at a golf club. My father had booked a room at his club.

Just two days before the party, the headmistress came to our class and told us to cancel the party. The Muslim girls - only seven of us - were not allowed to attend the party because it was haram. The non-Muslims were not allowed to attend because it was too close to the examination. If we were caught attending the party, she would not give us testimonials nor a clean school-leaving certificate. We were shocked, to say the least.

Looking back at my school life, I find it very hard to understand, much less to agree with, some of the pronouncements about Islamic teachings as expounded by the ustazah and her league.

I am sure the ustazah would not approve of my father inviting Chinese, Indians, and Westerners to a buka puasa dinner. But my father saw the guests in his house as friends, not Chinese, Indians or whatever.

Maybe the ustazah is right. But I think my father cannot be wrong either. I really don't know.

In spite of all my sins, I completed school and got my SPM with distinctions in certain subjects, including, Ugama Islam.

I wish I could give more support to the Prime Minister in his efforts to