

## **PM: Good to discuss national unity**

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says national unity is an important topic that requires much discussion by Malaysians. Is an important topic that requires much discussion by Malaysians. He is pleased that people are taking it up as an issue because if nobody talks about it, no one will pay attention to the matter.

Speaking to reporters after launching a school building fund here, Abdullah said although he disagreed with views that there was now a lack of racial unity in the country, he was pleased the topic had become a point of discussion.

"I am glad that people are taking up national unity as an issue and talking about it. It is definitely an important topic that concerns everybody and we want people to talk about it so that they will always think about it. If nobody talks about it, no one will pay attention to the matter," he said.

The Prime Minister said unity had improved greatly compared to earlier days. He admitted, however, that there was still room for improvement and the Government would continue to focus on building national unity.

"The unity we experience now is better but it should be improved upon through our interaction and co-operation with one another," he said.

However, he cautioned that results would not be achieved overnight.

"Unity-building is not an easy task and it will take a long time and require concerted efforts from all parties," he said. The issue of racial unity came up when historian Datuk Khoo Kay Kim, one of the architects of the Rukun Negara, said in an interview with the New Sunday Times yesterday that after 49 years of independence, race relations were still fragile.

Yesterday, several opinion leaders such as Asli Centre for Public Policy Studies chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities president Professor Emeritus Tengku Datuk Shamsul Bahrin and Universiti Sains Malaysia Vice-Chancellor Prof Datuk Dzulkipli Abd Razak concurred with Khoo, adding that local politicians were partly to blame for segregating the people by playing racial politics.

In response, Abdullah admitted that there were indeed some politicians who practised racial politics.

"Sometimes they think it is an easy way to get votes.

"But it is not the right way because playing racial politics will only fire up people's racial sentiments, which if not controlled, would be detrimental to our country," he said.

He agreed with Khoo's suggestion that cultural history be taught in schools to strengthen racial understanding and tolerance.

"That is a good idea, because our children should be taught to respect one another during their school years.

"Parents should also play a role in helping to teach their children not to be prejudiced towards other races."

Abdullah launched a SPM preparatory class and fund for an RM18 million Peninsular Malay Students Foundation (Yayasan Gabungan Pelajar Melayu Semenanjung) building to be built in Kelemak, Alor Gajah. Earlier, a developer, Datuk Wong Soon Lim of the Jaymuda Group, donated RM1 million to the fund.

"It was a good gesture," Abdullah said.

"This is a worthy programme to help students who usually would not have the chance to get tuition to improve their competitiveness in school."

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