

# Where is the racial bonding?

NST- 26/11/2007

**BANGI:** The little cafe in Bangunan Pusanika in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) had only one empty table when I arrived yesterday morning.

Grabbing the unoccupied table, I sat down with my cup of Milo and observed the students who were busy chatting in between mouthfuls of nasi lemak.

There I was, geared up to see prime examples of racial integration at this premier university.

Two-and-a-half-hours later, I was not so sure.

There were 10 other tables at the cafe, aside from mine, and yes, they were filled with students of all races.

The problem was they were only sitting with their friends of the same race.

Three tables were occupied with students with headscarves, while six tables had single occupants, including a woman dressed in a professional suit.

Another table had a group of six Malay students.

During the following hours, students left and others came, but they either sat in groups of the same race or alone.

The odd thing was that if a student arrived alone and shared a table with a student of a different race, he or she

would not talk or exchange greetings with the table's other occupant.

A Chinese student joined a table occupied by a Malay student, but they did not exchange a word. Instead, the Chinese student was working on his laptop while the Malay student continued reading his newspaper.

The only table there with a multiracial mix was the table occupied by my photographer, Sairien Nafis and me, and we were getting odd looks from the other students.

Sairien and I then went down to the cafeteria, where we were again greeted by the same sight.

The tables were all full of students, but they sat in groups of the same race.

You could hear snippets of conversation from all sides of the cafeteria in the language or dialect of the group occupying the table.

There were also students studying and copying notes in groups at the cafeteria, but this was also done in groups of the same race. There was not a single multiracial group sitting together.

Outside the cafeteria, students were seen walking together to class. Again, in groups of the same race. — **By Sonia Ramachandran**