

# Education our best tool for unity

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**COMMUNAL** ties are at their most delicate in nearly four decades. It is terrifying to realise how easily racial and religious sentiments can be aroused for political advantage.

The education system which has become more communal despite its supposed non-ethnic and non-religious status is the main reason for the growing division between the races.

Initially, we had all races studying together in one class but then they were segregated by race for the purpose of religious and moral classes resulting in students of the same race grouping together, but under the same roof. Today we have taken another backward step with each race studying in their own vernacular schools under separate roofs and rarely do they ever come together.

The learning of vernacular languages should be encouraged as by itself is not the cause of racial disunity. But segregating the pupils for the purpose is discriminative. In fact there is no better way of fostering racial integration other than encouraging our children to learn each other's language.

We need to revamp the education system to return it to its original status and aspiration of unifying the races through the national schools. Our national schools must reflect our racial and religious diversity. Pupils of all races and creed must be placed in one class so that they can interact freely with one another. Emphasis on their common identities rather than their differences should be encouraged.

There should also be a racially balanced mix of teachers as well in all our national schools. It is common knowledge that if there is diversity in the same environment then there will be more tolerance and goodwill and that is the best way to fight fanaticism and fundamentalism in a community.

We need politicians who are true national leaders and not ethnic champions. In the 60s, every citizen looked up to politi-

in this globalised world, we Malaysians - regardless of race - must unite and pool our resources and expertise so as to remain competitive

We yearn for the day when Malaysians will share a single identity, but gauging by present developments in the country, this is fast eluding us. Our aspiration for a united Malaysia is sadly not being appreciated by the present generation of leaders who are taking over the

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cians as Malaysian leaders but now we consider them as leaders of the Malays, Chinese or Indians. Problems faced by a community are solely left to its own minister to handle. Even the prime minister, who should be the leader of all races, is increasingly seen as the leader of the Malays only.

Our divide along ethnic lines is beginning to be seen as a great loss to the nation's productivity and competitiveness. If we want to survive and succeed

reins of power and the visions envisaged by our founding forefathers is fast eluding us.

We must urgently wake up from the denial syndrome that has inflicted our society, act fast to re-build our resources by uniting the people of various ethnicity. The sooner we do that the better our chances of success in a highly competitive world.

**Dr Chris Anthony Butterworth**