

# Innovative programmes to help foster unity

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**KUALALUMPUR:** Programmes to be introduced in universities to tackle the problem of racial polarisation will be creative and innovative.

The Higher Education Ministry and the National Unity and Integration Department would join forces to come up with more effective programmes to encourage the spirit of unity and integration.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said yesterday a study would be conducted over six weeks starting January to review the status quo.

"We need to look at the current state of affairs and take stock of all programmes available on racial integration among students."

The study, which Mustapa said would be a short one by university staff, was needed as there was no strong evidence of racial polarisation.

"All we have is random information and anecdotal evidence. What we need are hard facts."

However, he said the current crop of university graduates did not seem to have a strong spirit of unity. Thus, the study's outcome would indicate how far they have succeeded in tackling the issue this year and this would be the basis for next year's programmes.

Lecturers would also be roped in as they have an important role to play in encouraging positive racial relations, said Mustapa, who was speaking after attending the finals of the 2006 inter-IPT debate on unity and integration at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Also present was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Maximus Ongkili, who said the programmes would also encourage confidence-building.

"University graduates must go back into the world with a proper perspective, one that is balanced and moderate and in line with national unity," he said, adding that the "creative" programmes would include camps, concerts, stage plays, sports and mini forums.

Mustapa said such programmes on campuses were important as "the university is the best place to promote racial harmony".

Later in Putrajaya, Mustapa said his ministry expected the

draft for the new ethnic relationships teaching module for public higher learning institutions to be ready in the middle of next year.

"The third draft to this module was rejected three weeks ago. We are finalising the fourth one," he said after a ceremony to present Prof Dr Othman Yatim's appointment letter as the Malay Studies Chair at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

He said the fourth module was being edited by UKM's World and Malay Civilisation Institute director Datuk Prof Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, who is also the ethnic relationship module co-ordinator.

In July, the ministry withdrew the first guideline book on ethnic relationships used by Universiti Putra Malaysia on fears that its contents, which touched on historical racial issues, could cause harm.

When contacted by the *New Straits Times*, Shamsul said the committee would meet and the feedback of all the different groups would be considered.

"The ministry had distributed hundreds of copies of the module to a wide cross section of people.

"The biggest challenge was to sort this out," he said, adding that the committee had agreed to be fair to everybody.

Shamsul, however, cautioned that there was no such thing as a final definite draft as the most important stakeholders had yet to give their feedback.

"The students themselves will be the judges," he added.