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Dr M: Bangsa Johor concept will divide Malaysians

PUTRAJAYA: Parochialism, including the *Bangsa Johor* concept raised by the state Crown Prince will divide Malaysians, warns Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

It could also result in the breakup of the Federation, he added.

While Johor has the right to promote the idea of a *Bangsa Johor*, the former prime minister said it was more important to get people to embrace themselves as Malaysians, rather than identifying themselves with the state they originate from.

"If each state wishes to separate, then the Federation will collapse.

"This notion can also lead to residents of a state feeling superior over another's. This is unhealthy.

"What we must actually do is to encourage unity. Only when the people are truly united as Malaysians can we prosper," he said in response to a question from the floor at the 20th Perdana-Dialogue Series yesterday.

Themed "Federal-States Relations", the conference was held at the Perdana Leadership Foundation here.

He warned there would be consequences

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should Johor decide to leave the Federation.

Dr Mahathir added that the prosperity and development enjoyed by the state was due to some help from the Federal Government.

He told the audience that Malaysia could only be developed and prosper after Independence in 1957 because all the states were united under the Federation.

Dr Mahathir stressed that "everyone should take a leaf from history books on the importance of unity".

"Malaysia has achieved a great deal of success and wealth through unity and the shared support system that has been put in place since Independence," he added.

The Tunku Mahkota of Johor, Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, has expressed on several occasions that Johor could leave Malaysia if the state felt that it was not governed well by the Federal Government.

He had also challenged detractors to seek his state's expulsion from the country if they were unhappy with how the state was run.

The Johor royal family had introduced the term *Bangsa Johor* to unite the people of the state regardless of race and religion.