

'DR M DRIVING UP DIVISIVE NARRATIVES'

CIJ study finds that the ex-PM is one of the key proponents of inflammatory statements on race

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THE Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) has found in a study that former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has emerged as one of the key proponents of inflammatory statements related to race, a view supported by political analysts.

CIJ executive director Wathshlah Naidu in a statement said CIJ, through its hate speech monitoring project for the upcoming state elections, had found that Dr Mahathir's ongoing narrative on challenging the status quo of non-Malays in Malaysia and claiming that the country is not a multiracial country but a Malay one produced user-generated comments which were both critical of Mahathir as well as those concurring with his position.

"These microaggressions have the intent to create an 'us' vs 'them' narrative built on stereotypes and misinformation by those in power and have the potential to marginalise and oppress 'the other' based on inherent racial and power hierarchy.

"Malaysian non-Malays had al-

so taken to social media to express how these continuing non-Malay dichotomy and divisive narratives are challenging their sense of belonging and contributing to a polarised nation.

"A Chinese-Bidayuh Malaysian also shared with us that he continued to receive racist comments when he expressed his thoughts on these divisive narratives online."

Wathshlah added that Malaysia was treading on dangerous ground if no accountability is demanded from those in power as they continue to sow the seeds of hatred, especially among Malaysian youths.

The monitoring project, which is held in collaboration with the University of Nottingham Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Sains Malaysia," had processed 18,721 posts during the respective time period of July 24 to 30 and coded the severity of speech, including those amounting to hate speech according to classifications.

"The classification of level one is disagreement or non-offensive language or content; level two is offensive or discriminatory language or content; level three is dehumanising or hostile language or content; and level four is language or content that includes incitement or a call for violence.

"The CIJ monitors have found that almost 85.08 per cent (15,927 posts) of social media posts were at level one, consisting of general comments and non-offensive disagreements on issues being monitored. The remaining posts are 2,765 posts (14.7 per cent) at

level two 25 posts (0.13 per cent) at level three; and four posts (0.02 per cent) at level four, respectively."

Wathshlah said the overall narratives of the posts are still centred on race, religion, gender and targeting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community, albeit not at high severity levels of hate speech.

On July 3, Dr Mahathir had said that promoting Malaysia as a multiracial country was against the Federal Constitution.

He had said this in response to calls from an Umno leader for him to stop playing up racial sentiments.

Political analysts, in agreeing with CIJ findings, said Dr Mahathir should not continue to drive up divisive narratives on race online.

Dr Ainul Adzellie Hasnul said Dr Mahathir's narrative that Malaysia was not a multiracial country was inflammatory and would have unwanted impact.

"He is a highly respected leader and his statements would inflict a negative impact on society.

"As a statesman, he should not have gone with such narratives."

Meanwhile, Dr Noor Nirwandy Mat Noordin said the issue of inflammatory race-based statements or narratives boils down to how a person understands the principles of the Rukun Negara.

"It is a must for everyone to digest the principles listed in the Rukun Negara and the Constitution in the first place so that there would be no issue of reiterating the narratives of what Dr Mahathir is carrying on about."