

Dr M: Rethink passport ruling

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KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - The ruling requiring Malaysians from the Peninsula to produce their passports when entering Sabah and Sarawak is unnecessary and inconsistent with the idea of a single nation.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there were other ways to control entry into Sabah and Sarawak without having to use passports.

"It doesn't look very good for foreigners to see us showing our passports to enter although you have every right to retain this ruling.

"Some people say it is because the time is not ripe yet but it has been 42 years. So I don't know when the time will finally ripen," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the Sabah Society's annual dinner as a guest lecturer on the topic "Federal-State Relationship: An Overview" at a hotel here

last night.

He said it would be sufficient to use the Malaysian identity card.

"You don't have to resort to checking shoes for explosives like in other countries.

"If they (Malaysians from the Peninsula) become a nuisance, send them back.

"This can all be done without the formality of a passport," he said.

However, despite minor matters like this, the relationship between the Federal and State Governments was good as evident from the thousands of Sabahans living in West Malaysia, he said.

He added that one of the ways to improve Federal-State relationship was to mingle more with each other to improve understanding.

"It would help to have more East Malaysians working in the Peninsula and vice-versa to encourage more mingling," he said, adding that there should not be any real distinction

between the two.

On the relevance of the 20-point agreement which was the basis for Sabah and Sarawak joining Malaysia in 1963, Dr Mahathir said that Sabah had to keep up with the times.

Insisting on staying with the points in the agreement was futile, he said.

"The agreement was formulated when Sabah and Sarawak were underdeveloped but things are different now. To rigidly insist on the agreement is no longer in keeping with the changes."

He cited the restriction on professionals coming to Sabah to work.

"At that time, there were hardly any professionals here in Sabah. So it was natural for Sabahans to protect their turf. But it is different now with the State university here.

"If you really want, I suggest that the people concerned raise their issues with the Federal Government."