

Dr M: Time to review states' special rights

BY RUBEN SARIO

KOTA KINABALU: The time may have come for a rethink on the special privileges accorded to Sabah during the country's formation more than 40 years ago, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The former prime minister said privileges such as the requirement for Malaysians from the peninsula to use their passports to enter Sabah was inconsistent with the single nation idea.

So were other privileges for Sabah as stated in a 20-point memorandum, including restricting the entry of professionals such as lawyers from the peninsula to work in Sabah.

"To insist that the 20 points should be followed rigidly would not be in keeping with the changes in Sabah and in the peninsula," he said in his talk on *Federal-State Relationship: An overview* to members of the

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Sabah Society here on Wednesday.

He said Sabahans should discuss the current need of the 20 points with an open mind.

On the passport issue, he said there were other ways for Sabah and Sarawak to exercise immigration control without requiring Malaysians from the peninsula to use the document.

He added that all that should be required was for Malaysians to produce their identity cards to enter both states.

He said apart from these "small things," relations between Sabah and the Federal Government had been good as the state and Kuala Lumpur were politically in-tune with both being administered by the Barisan Nasional government.

Dr Mahathir said because of the current situation, issues that could not be resolved at the government-to-government level could be dealt with through political channels.

"Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman can speak to the Prime Minister, who is also his party president," he added.

Later, in response to questions from the floor, Dr Mahathir said one of the most effective approaches to fostering closer relations between Sabah and the peninsula was for more youths from the state to work in Peninsular Malaysia.

Asked whether his feelings about the Malays had changed since he wrote the *Malay Dilemma* about 40 years ago, he said his opinion about the community had "changed somewhat."

"They are now capable and have proven that they can achieve things, but many are still too dependent on the Government.

"Most of them are still unwilling to change. Their willingness to learn and work is important," Dr Mahathir added.