

No room for fun and games in our varsities: Mahathir 268

THE Government is taking steps to ensure its educational programmes are not disrupted by undesirable student activities and shortage of textbooks, Education Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamed said today.

He said Malaysia, at this stage of development, could not afford such disruptions.

Dr. Mahathir was opening the Association of South-East Asian Institutions of Higher Learning seminar on Scholarly Publishing at the National Institute of Public Administration in Petaling Jaya.

"The developed countries can have fun and games at their universities but here, we are very much inclined towards insisting that universities play their traditional roles — that is, they should teach and do research," he said.

He added that Malaysia had implicit faith in education as a means of achieving developments and this was reflected in the Government's allocation of 24 per cent of its budget to education.

Acts which obstruct or distract students and academics from pursuing their primary objectives of teaching and doing research would harm the nation's development.

Loan scheme

The Government, however, realised also that universities should not be ivory towers.

Dr. Mahathir said the Government had tried to overcome the shortage of textbooks by commissioning the writing and translation of books and doing its own publication.

Recently, the Government had also decided to lend textbooks to pupils.

Dr. Mahathir said this free loan scheme, costing the Government initially \$62 million, is to help the poor pupils.

The Ministry was also supporting universities' efforts in academic publication.

As from this year, the University of Malaya, will be allocated \$35,000 for the development of academic journals in the Faculties of Science and Law.

"If other faculties come up with concrete proposals for publishing journals, I am sure the necessary financing will be made available because a revolving fund

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of \$100,000 has been provided by the University of Malaya."

Dr. Mahathir said the scheme was a challenge to academics to produce scholarly papers of satisfactory international standards for a journal under their own faculty's editorship.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya, Prof. Ungku Aziz, said greater regional solidarity and integrity in the field of higher education could be brought about by showing more respect to scholars in the region.

Recognition

"South-East Asian scholars, like the proverbial prophets, only seem to have been able to gain recognition outside their own countries, frequently in the so-called western and eastern portion of this world," he said.

Prof. Ungku Aziz suggested that countries in the region should establish their own regional journals with translations in the main languages of the region.

More than 70 participants, including scholars and editors from as far as Canada and Australia, are attending the three-day conference.