

Reporters: CHEONG MEI SUI and RUHANIE AHMAD

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**KUALA LUMPUR,**

**Thurs.** — The

Government will not be pressured into withdrawing the proposed new law on universities, Education Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamed told the Dewan-Negara today.

"We will not budge an inch," he said when moving the Universities and University College Bill.

He added that there were some Malaysians trying to solicit help from other countries to put pressure on the Government.

"I would like to remind these people that every country they are turning to for support, everyone of them has its own skeletons in its cupboards which will not bear scrutiny," he said.

The Bill seeks more stringent rules and regulations for students. One of the amendments provides for the suspension of students found guilty of any criminal offence.

Another seeks to give the Vice-Chancellors powers to appoint deans and deputy deans and propose changes in their universities' constitutions regarding appointment of senior administrative staff.

Dr. Mahathir described as "naive" the opinion of some people that academic freedom meant special exemptions from the law.

"These people believe that the grounds on which universities stand are sacred and may not be desecrated by such people as the mata-mata who enforces the law."

Academic freedom, he said, meant "freedom to seek knowledge, to pursue any course without being hampered or obstructed by considerations other than academic."

Dr. Mahathir added academic freedom did not mean that those who stay or work in the campuses were above the law.

"It does not mean that crimes may be committed in university grounds with complete immunity from the processes of the laws of the country.

"No such university in the whole world has such rights."

Explaining why the

# Varsities Bill: Govt won't bow to pressure

amendments were necessary, Dr. Mahathir said there was "no discipline at all" in the universities.

"Students took over a campus and expelled the university authorities. They have threatened a Vice-Chancellor and warned him they would close the university in three days if certain things were not done."

Obviously, this called for measures to enforce discipline in the universities, he added.

Dr. Mahathir warned of chaos if stringent measures were not taken to control students' demonstrations.

## False names

One "frightening" effect of the demonstrations was that it would help the communist terrorists because the security forces would have to be diverted to safeguard the situation in the towns.

The recent demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang had indirectly helped the terrorists, he added.

The government, Dr. Mahathir said, had found the demonstrations "very well organised."

"The demonstrators had been instructed on how to avoid the law. This was by giving false names and incorrect institutions of higher learning."

Dr. Mahathir said the

Government had "entertained" demonstrations all this while with the hope that such efforts would satisfy the students.

It was also to make sure that students would come to the negotiating table to solve issues.

But such Government efforts produced results to the contrary.

"The demonstrations became larger each time. The students thought that the Government was scared," he added.

During the debate, Sen. Datuk Nik Hassan Nik Yahaya said certain political figures have "used" students to achieve their ends.

He suggested the Government control the activities of the academic staff who were trying to organise protest actions against the amended Act.

Sen. Dr. Lim Ah Sitt urged the Minister to hold constant dialogues with students to hear their problems and help to solve them.

Sen. Datuk Ahmad Arshad suggested the Government keep a close watch over students planning to visit foreign countries under the pretext of "study tours."

"They may give a bad image of Malaysia or they may be influenced by certain unhealthy elements while abroad," he added.

He also said that prior to last December's de-

monstration, students had conducted several early morning religious gatherings in Masjid Negara.

"But they were not actually a religious gathering. They were gatherings to plan a demonstration," he said.

Sen. Haji Abdul Rahim Manan commended Dr. Mahathir and the Government for amending the Act.

He said students should be thankful that this country had achieved independence and that several universities were set up for them.

"They never knew how bitter the struggle for independence was and they never knew how difficult it was to set up universities," he added.

## Lecturers, 'too

He also suggested that the Government control the activities of lecturers and, if possible, ban them from taking part in political activities "because their ideologies will poison the minds of innocent students."

Sen. Hajjah Salmah said students should be given an opportunity to express constructive views and criticisms. A complete curb on freedom of speech might produce even more detrimental results, she added.

She blamed the lack of discipline among students on the scant attention given to religious education in both Form Six and university levels.

Sen. Datuk Syed Kechik Mohamed congratulated Dr. Mahathir for introducing the Bill. He said there was no reason for students to demonstrate. If they were dissatisfied, they could always choose another Government in the next election.

The debate continues tomorrow.