

Varsities get the go-ahead

By LEE KAR YEAN

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government has decided to allow foreign universities to set up branch campuses locally.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that this was to cut down the increasing expenditure of seeking tertiary education overseas.

"It is hoped that with this move, more Malaysians will have the chance to pursue higher education," the Prime Minister said at the Tunku Abdul Rahman College's convocation at Wisma MCA here.

Dr Mahathir is the first Prime

Minister to attend the college's convocation. A total of 1,537 students graduated yesterday.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said there had been a few proposals from foreign universities, including those in Britain and Japan, to set up branch campuses in Malaysia.

"We are aware that many of our students are attending these foreign universities, and the expenses are getting increasingly higher every year.

"We cannot set up our own universities because staff, including lecturers and professors, are difficult to find," he said.

It is learnt that Malaysians

spend over \$1 billion annually in pursuing education abroad.

The Prime Minister said that it would be better to "bring in" the foreign universities rather than spending a lot of money overseas.

However, he said, the courses to be made available locally needed to be in line with the requirements of the national education policy.

Among the courses which would be of immediate importance to make Malaysia a developed nation would be those in the technical and engineering fields, he said.

Asked whether he envisioned the abolishment of the quota sys-

tem in the various institutions of higher learning by the year 2020, Dr Mahathir said the question of quota would be only irrelevant when the government could produce sufficient bumiputras who were competitive in the open market.

"I think that if we are successful in our efforts to bridge the gap between the races and reduce racial feelings, we may be able to have a society that would not be dependent on quota."

He also said the government would study the need to recognise the rest of the TAR college

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certificates if this had become a hindrance to the college.

"What is important is that all the races could enjoy the same education benefits," he said.

Earlier, in his speech, Dr Mahathir said he attended the college's convocation to observe its achievements and to evaluate its role in the national education system.

"TAR college should review its role in the context of changes which have taken place in the country.

"The philosophy of the college enacted in the 60s has become outdated and needs to be reviewed and changed," he added.

Dr Mahathir said that at the moment the bumiputras were still lagging behind in the education field and the percentage of bumiputra professionals was still too low.

Although the government had given many scholarships to the bumiputras to study overseas, they accounted for only 15 per cent of the total number of Malaysian students abroad, he said.

He also said that economic cake was expected to be eight times as big by 2020 and the distribution of wealth among the various communities should be fair to reduce the economic gap among them.

"By the year 2020, racial issues should become irrelevant because everyone should be capable of competing without any handicap," he added.

The Prime Minister said that the Malaysian nation by that time would have its own identity and not reflect the identity of the original country of any community.

The Prime Minister presented scrolls to the students of diplomas in technology (building), diploma in technology (electronic engineering), diploma in technology (materials engineering), diploma in technology (mechanical and manufacturing engineering), certificate in computer with accounting, certificate in computer studies, certificate in accounting with business computing.

Also present were MCA President Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, party deputy president and Health Minister Datuk Lee Kim Sai, MCA secretary-general and Housing and Local Government Minister Dr Ting Chew Pei and MCA Vice-President and Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim / Lek.