

Dr M: Varsity students can protest but not be violent

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said university students could register their protests by holding demonstrations but added that they should not do so by obstructing others in a violent manner.

Dr Mahathir said the students could express their disagreements and that he did not view the University and Universities Colleges Act 1971 as an obstruction for them to carry out their activities.

He said the students were entitled to their opinion, just as others were entitled to theirs.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a demonstration by about 500 Universiti Malaya students last month against popular composer and singer M. Nasir during a concert at the Perdana-siswa.

He was also asked if the Government would relax the University and Universities Colleges Act.

Dr Mahathir said students should study first and equip themselves with knowledge.

"They are entitled to their opinion, just as others are entitled to theirs ...

"We spend money on our students to study. For every ringgit they spend as fees, the Government spends RM23. We support them and

want them to get properly educated. But instead they don't concentrate on their studies.

"They feel that as university students they need to correct society ... but we're not certain that as university students they really know what is the actual situation in the society which they want to correct.

"We ourselves sometimes can't do this (correct society) ...

"So, I think they should study first. After they've acquired sufficient knowledge, then they can demonstrate on their own time and expense.

"But demonstrating at our expense, well I don't think we want that...."

He said Malaysia was a developing country and could not afford to waste the resources of its students.

Section 16 of the Act states that if any faculty students' organisation, students' council or students' body of a university conducts itself in a manner which the University Council considers detrimental or prejudicial to the well-being of a university, or violates any provision of this Act or rules or regulations, the University Council may suspend or dissolve such organisation, council or body.

On the irregularities in the Sabah Foundation, he

said the Government had appointed a private body to study its operations and would have to study its report in detail to ascertain if any irregularities were committed.

Asked if the report would be made public, Dr Mahathir said he could not say for sure as the matter was being looked into by the Federal and State Governments.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after opening the Complex Perdana-siswa Universiti Malaya.

In conjunction with the ceremony, a satellite teleconference was held which introduced the distance learning programme between Universiti Malaya and the National Technological University of the United States.

Universiti Malaya created history by being the first location outside the US and the Pacific Rim to receive such a programme.

Forty-six competitive universities in the US are affiliated to the NTU which enables distance learning programmes from these universities to be telecast live to the UM campus.

It was set up with the cooperation of Motorola, in particular Motorola Malaysia Sdn Bhd and Motorola University, Schumburg, US.