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Mahathir-Universities

UNIVERSITIES SHOULD REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY: PM

JOHOR BAHRU, 7 Sept (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said universities should have close links with the community and play a role in bringing progress to society.

The Prime Minister said universities could not be separated from the community and operate like an Ivory Tower.

The characteristic of a university today is different and it should be relevant to the community surrounding it, he said when launching the University Industry Technology Advancement Programme (Unitap) at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in Skudai here.

Dr Mahathir said what universities did today should be of benefit to society and there could no longer be any separation like previously.

The education obtained in universities should be used not just in the universities but also within the society, he said.

He added that since Malaysia was now rapidly industrialising, the focus was on that field and related industries.

Malaysians did not have much time and energy and should therefore concentrate on areas that would be of relevance, he said, and added that was why the government gave priority to academic fields that had close links with industries.

Dr Mahathir said he believed that academicians would agree that they too must be relevant to society and no longer work in isolation.

He said the government had set up several universities but was faced with the problem of providing the required academic staff.

"We can build beautiful universities... indeed universities that are more beautiful than universities in developing countries, (but) what's important is not the building but the academic staff," he added.

The Prime Minister said it was not easy to obtain academic staff and as a result the government was facing problems in setting up more universities to provide education to the people in line with the country's drive towards industrialisation.

He said the private sector could offer better salaries than the government and it was sometimes four times more.

As a result, he said, academic staff were leaving universities to join the private sector and this had become a problem for the government.

Dr Mahathir said due to inadequate academic staff, the government had to change its approach and privatise universities as otherwise the universities would be left with no academic staff.

Many parties are dissatisfied with the move but the government wanted to see academicians paid a reasonable salary, he said.

"The scenario in Malaysia has changed and the people should understand this problem. We cannot return to the previous period which probably was calm and easy compared to the present period which is more complex," he added.

Dr Mahathir hoped academicians would accept that fact because there was a great demand for education in this country and the government was unable to increase the number of universities except through the setting up of private institutions.

Unitap is a programme aimed at establishing closer links between UTM and the the industry to ensure that technological excellence continued to expand and benefitted the people.

Under the programme, academicians and the industry would work together

in to in areas such as research and development and technological transfer.  
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