

27/08/1999

It's now Universiti Teknologi Mara

Kamarul Yunus

AFTER 43 years of existence and several name changes, Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) is now a university.

However, its existing function to provide privileges for Bumiputeras to pursue higher education at its campus remains.

Announcing this yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government has accorded university status to ITM as recognition of its dynamic progress and the high level of achievement of its educational programmes.

"Actually, it (upgrade to university status) is already long overdue. It (the new status) is also because ITM has expanded and many of its graduates have achieved success.

"ITM plays an important function in the country's development," Dr Mahathir told newsmen after addressing a "premier gathering" of some 15,000 students and graduates of ITM in Shah Alam yesterday.

The Prime Minister explained that a proposal to upgrade ITM into a university-status institute was submitted to the Government during its early years but was not approved as the Government then was not in the position to do so.

On whether the fees for ITM students will be increased following the upgrading of the status, Dr Mahathir said Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak will look into it.

But he stressed that the Government will make sure that qualified students will not be deprived of proper education. "This is why I stressed during my speech earlier that it is important for ITM to maintain diploma courses," he said.

In his speech earlier, Dr Mahathir said ITM was initially established to offer diploma courses in view of the importance to develop the Bumiputera society.

"ITM is unique compared to other universities and colleges in terms of its responsibility in building up the Bumiputera society," he said, likening the situation to a boat with its crew and captain.

"In a boat, there must be a crew and a captain. Not everyone can be captain of the ship. If everyone wants to be a captain, there will be chaos.

"Thus, universities should not just offer degrees but must also continue to provide diploma courses. If not, everyone will be clever and wants to be a captain or even a prime minister," he said.

At present, 70 per cent of ITM courses are of diploma level, while the remaining 30 per cent are degree and master programmes.

Najib later told reporters that the Government will amend the ITM Act (Amendment) 1976 in line with the accordance of university status to the institute.

"This will be done in the next Parliament session," he said, adding that ITM will from now be known as Universiti Teknologi Mara.

ITM was established in 1965 (see CORRECTION above) as a training chamber (dewan latihan) for the Rural Industrial Development Authority (Rida). Later that year, it became Maktab Mara and two years later the name was changed to Institut Teknologi Mara.

ITM has grown by leaps and bounds. From merely 20 students studying at the Rida training chamber, ITM has now produced more than 143,000 graduates in various professions.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir launched the Yayasan Budiman Intekma, a foundation set up by former ITM students, employees and officials. DRB-HICOM chairman Tan Sri Saleh Sulong was appointed chairman of the foundation, and Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange president Datuk Mohd Salleh Abdul Majid his deputy.

The Prime Minister also received donations worth some RM475,000 from various organisations and individuals on behalf of Yayasan Budiman Intekma.

Dr Mahathir presented the "Tokoh ITM Alumni" to four recipients during the function. Besides Saleh and Mohd Salleh, the other two recipients of the award are Amim Holdings Sdn Bhd sales general manager Aishah Ahmad and FA Peninsular Bhd managing director Datuk Mohd Fasri Samsudin.

On suggestions made by the Barisan Nasional Youth that the Government amend the Universities and Colleges Act, the Prime Minister said the Government will look into it.

"What is important is that students who are given places in such institutes of higher learning should concentrate on their studies rather than be involved in other activities, including politics.

"They should concentrate on their studies to gain more knowledge on certain areas," the Prime Minister said.

ITM Rector Datuk Prof Dr Ahmad Zaidee Laidin said the Government is expected to spend about RM1.2 billion for the development of ITM for the next five years. This includes the proposed development of branch campuses in Selangor and Pahang.

He added that ITM will negotiate with other local universities to provide places for its students to study medicine and dentistry.

(END)