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Dr M on picking right university courses to meet country's needs

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KAJANG, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said students must take into consideration the needs of the nation and acquire skills towards this when selecting university courses.

Otherwise, he said, there would be a mismatch between the courses selected and vacancies available, and this would cause graduates to be unemployed.

And when they were unemployed, he added, they would be angry with the Government and join the Opposition.

"I think it is necessary to talk to students before they attend university and tell them of job opportunities.

"If they pursue courses that they are interested in, they may not have jobs when they graduate."

He said there were students who went all the way to a foreign university for courses which were not in demand in the country, and when they returned and could not find jobs, they become angry with the Government.

"But they make the choice. Now, the demand is for people skilled in technical fields like electronics and electrical engineering.

"If you study other things, don't be angry with the Government when there are no jobs," Dr Mahathir said after officially opening Universiti Tenaga Nasional.

The event was attended by some 5,000 students. Also present were Deputy Education Ministers Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin and Datuk Hon Choon Kim, Unites' board chairman Tan Sri Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali, and its rector Dr Tajul Arus Noh.

Dr Mahathir said many students might think they could not excel in courses they were not interested in. "But this is not true.

"Before science and technology developed, students were interested only in arts courses. They felt that a degree in arts would enable them to do anything, from becoming an administrator to an armed forces chief.

"But when knowledge that was more specific to a particular task was introduced, those who had thought that their interest was only in arts found that they could excel when they choose a new field that was more specific and suitable to their jobs."

Dr Mahathir said the assumption that only certain races could master particular knowledge was not true. Anyone, he said, could master knowledge if he or she worked hard to acquire it.

Dr Mahathir also stressed the importance of mastering information technology. He said if Malaysians were skilled in IT, the country would be able to face the challenges of globalisation, E-commerce, K-economy and the information explosion.

"Perhaps there are many who are not confident that we can master IT. But we need many people to be skilled in technological fields.

"For those who lack the confidence, they must keep in mind that any kind of skill can be acquired if they work hard and persevere in their efforts."

He said Malaysians needed to master knowledge relating to hardware, software, and communications applications.

Touching on excellence in education, Dr Mahathir said Malaysian universities must be of international standard.

As such, he said, there was a need for universities to forge ties with other higher educational institutions in the country and abroad.

"External examiners, whether from foreign or other local educational institutions, can help assess the standard of degrees offered by our universities.

"If the examiners are from well-known universities, then the chances for the degrees offered to be recognised worldwide is better."

Dr Mahathir expressed concern that some private higher educational institutions were not "up to standard".

"We have some 600 private educational institutions and we worry that some are not up to standard. We have been very generous in awarding licences."

Asked for measures taken to ensure private institutions adhered to stipulated standards, he said: "We have to see whether they can upgrade their standard."

Dr Mahathir urged higher educational institutions to ensure that their students were not only knowledgeable but also ethical.

"Otherwise, whatever knowledge acquired will be abused. Knowledge is power but a saying goes, 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'."

The Prime Minister also praised Unitem's facilities.

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