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PM: Don't waste public funds

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KOTA KINABALU, Tues. - Bumiputera university students who are more interested in holding anti-Government demonstrations and rallies than studying should give up their seats as they are wasting public funds, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said they should give their places to others more interested in studying.

"They do not need university education to hold demonstrations and protests. If they want to take part in such activities, they should give up their places at the university to others who are really interested in pursuing their education," Dr Mahathir said.

The large amount of public funds allocated to provide education to Bumiputera students would be wasted if they spent their time and energy in activities that had nothing to do with their studies.

He said these students, susceptible to influences by political groups and anti-Government proponents, were performing poorly in their studies compared to non-Bumiputeras.

This was because these students were busy with demonstrations and protests.

Dr Mahathir expressed fear that if the trend persisted, Bumiputera university students who are mostly assisted by Government scholarships and grants, would not be able to compete with non-Bumiputeras.

This, he added, would defeat the cardinal principle of the New Economic Policy which was introduced to ensure that, among others, Bumiputeras could compete with others in the area of education.

He added that although 60 per cent of places at universities were taken up by Bumiputeras, their pass rate was disappointing.

"Those who managed to pass did not get a good class," he said.

Attributing their poor performance to their involvement in political activities organised by the Opposition to propagate anti-Government sentiments, the Prime Minister said lecturers who were against the Government and Opposition members had poisoned the minds of the students.

"They (the students) are being told that they need not be grateful to the Government for their place at the universities and their scholarships. They are told that it is the responsibility of any Government to provide education to its people."

Dr Mahathir was delivering his address entitled Racial Unity, the Role of Universities and Challenges of Globalisation at Universiti Sabah Malaysia. He was given a rousing welcome by about 2,500 students and staff of the university earlier when opening the main campus.

Responding to the warm welcome, he quipped: "I am normally not this popular, especially at universities in Peninsular Malaysia."

Dr Mahathir said students in some of the universities felt that they could govern the country better than the present Government.

"If the Government feels that their demands are unreasonable and cannot be met, they resort to actions such as demonstrations."

Dr Mahathir said certain political parties were using Islam to influence students to turn anti-Government.

He appealed to Bumiputera students not to forego the opportunity of pursuing higher education which was being offered by the Government at very high cost.

He said these students should be grateful to the Government for

scholarships and study grants.

Dr Mahathir said the Government gave financial assistance to university students to ensure that they were equipped with adequate knowledge to inherit the country's leadership.

"Everything that the Government now does is for the younger generation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the younger generation, instead of just waiting to inherit the country's leadership, should assist the Government shape the future.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir said all quarters should pay attention to improving the achievement of Bumiputera university students.

"They get very angry when we ask them to concentrate on their studies. When they don't put serious effort in their studies, it is impossible for them to succeed."

Dr Mahathir said universities must ensure that teaching staff did not deviate from the curriculum and give greater emphasis to the performance of Bumiputeras.

"If need be, professors and lecturers should give coaching to students who are weak in their studies," he said.

"Lecturers should pledge to fulfill their responsibilities sincerely. If they deviate, they should be removed."

He said such a move was necessary to ensure that university teaching staff were able to inculcate noble values among their students.

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