

A treat for country's top SPM achievers

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. — Never in their dreams' did the nation's top scorers expect to be feted to lunch with the country's most important person.

Nor did they expect to see the personal side of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other Cabinet Ministers as well.

A total of 190 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia top achievers were at Putrajaya at the invitation of the Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in honour of their achievements in the examination.

The country's top scorer for the SPM, Ong Jin Hock, felt he did not really "deserve" the attention showered upon him.

"I have been in the limelight so much during these past months and I think it is nice that all the other 200-odd top scorers have been given due recognition as well.

"Besides, I think they are more deserving and more intelligent than I am," he said.

Ong, from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Ibrahim, Sungai Petani, Kedah, scored 12 AIs and aspires to be a computer engineer.

He is hoping to obtain a scholarship to further his studies in the United States.

He was also inspired by the Prime Minister's speech at the function, adding that he would like to be remembered "not as someone who received much, but as someone who gave a lot".

Ong cited multi-millionaire Bill

Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corporation, as an example of someone who gave back to society, donating millions of dollars to charity and research.

He also advised fellow students to always remember that they were first and foremost Malaysians and that they should always return home to serve.

Kalpana Sehgal Paras Ram, from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Methodist ACS in Kampar, Perak, scored 11 AIs.

She was seated at the same table as the Prime Minister and was bowled over by his charm and wit.

"He has a very good sense of humour and he is very friendly," she said.

"His speech has also given me motivation and encouragement in pursuing my dream and aspirations."

Harkiran Kaur, responding to the Prime Minister's speech on the need to serve the society, hoped she could play a productive role in such efforts when she graduated.

She studied in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taman Melawati and aspires to be an accountant.

Both Kalpana and Harkiran were honoured to be present at the event and thanked the Deputy Prime Minister for the invitation.

Kalpana's father, Paras Ram, said that by honouring the top achievers, the Government would motivate future SPM candidates to strive harder.

Meanwhile, in a *Bernama* interview, Raiha Hasni from Sungai

Petani said the gathering has inspired her to strive harder to be a medical specialist.

"I never imagines being entertained by our national leaders, let alone by Dr Mahathir and Pak Lah (by which Abdullah is fondly referred to) . . . I shall cherish this moment for the rest of my life," she said.

Raiha, who hailed from Sungai Petani, and is now doing her matriculation in Kuala Pilah, scored A1 for all the nine subjects she sat for.

Raiha's mother Rohani Ismail, who accompanied her, said the function also allowed parents to share the joy and pride of the children's accomplishments.

Wong Yew Choe, who sat for the SPM when studying at Petaling Jaya's Catholic High School, described mingling with the Prime Minister, his deputy and the Ministers as "an unexpected and once in a lifetime event".

"I had a great time . I never dreamt of this," said Wong who appreciated the Government's desire to see the top achievers get to know each other and had even compiled their e-mail addresses to keep in touch after this.

The students were excitable, and the scene was similar to that at a pop concert.

The Prime Minister and other Cabinet members present were busy entertaining requests for autographs and posing for photographs.