

VARSAITY HOPE

STAR - 7 MAY 2001

Non-bumi top scorers may get reserved seats, says PM

By FARID JAMALUDIN

SUBANG JAYA: Non-bumiputra top scorers may be given unfilled places in universities reserved for bumiputras, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said it was pointless to "reserve" the seats when bumiputras do not seem to be interested in excelling themselves at various insti-

tutes of higher education.

"Neither have they the right to deny non-bumiputras of places in universities," he told reporters here after opening the *Dinosaur Alive* exhibition here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a proposal by Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob that unfilled bumiputra seats be given to qualified non-bumiputra students.

Adnan said there were 7,168 un-

filled bumiputras seats while a large number of non-bumiputras who scored top marks were denied places in universities and other institutes of higher learning.

Dr Mahathir said that since independence, the Government had provided ample opportunities for bumiputras, adding that if they were still not interested in taking them up, then it would have to be fair to non-bumiputras.

"Furthermore, we cannot have such a situation because non-bumiputras who excel in their studies are being pinched by other countries.

"We cannot afford to have a brain drain, especially when the country is inching towards developed-nation status," he added.

He said if the Government continued to have unfilled university seats for bumiputras, deserving

and qualified non-bumiputras would make a beeline for other countries.

"If Malays or bumiputras are not interested, we will give the seats to others who can meet the requirements, irrespective of whether they are bumiputras or not," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia

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would not create a situation where those who were not keen to study were given the right to stop others who were interested and capable.

Asked whether the Government intended to do away with

the quota system for the bumiputras, Dr Mahathir said:

"I am leaving the decision to the people, whether they want it or not.

"What we (the Government) are doing is in the best interest of the people.

"We do it for the people ... if

they feel that the Government is implementing a bad policy imposing the quota, and they don't want the quota, then the Government can abolish it," he added.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik described Dr Mahathir's statement as

"very fair."

"Although he cares for the welfare of bumiputras, he is truly a prime minister for all Malaysians.

"I think this is a positive step forward," he said.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu thanked Dr Ma-

hathir for his wisdom.

"If we don't take care of our good students, they will lose confidence in the country and the Government," he said, adding that the country also could not afford a drain in foreign exchange.

PAS president Datuk Fadzil

Noor said the Government should conduct an in-depth study first before giving up bumiputra seats to non-bumiputras.

He suggested that a task force comprising Malay academicians and educationists study the matter.