

'Impossible to achieve full tertiary enrnlment'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed: Entries to local public higher learning institutions will always be disputed as long as there are students who fail to make the cut.

Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said today, achieving a 100% tertiary enrolment is impossible and that, no country in the world has ever accomplished that.

"However, the issue will not arise if all parties understand the limitations of universities in terms of infrastructure as well as the teaching faculty," he told a news conference at Parliament lobby.

Musa was referring to the controversy surrounding a newspaper report on May 3 which stated that there were 7,168 unfilled places reserved for bumiputras for the 2001/2002 academic session.

He said the problems will continue to arise if certain parties keep expecting local universities to provide places for all qualified students.

"Every year, there are cases of qualified bumiputra and non-bumiputra students who are not shortlisted by these institutions.

"They will have to seek other alternatives for tertiary education."

Musa said it is because of such instances that motivated the setting up of more private higher learning institutions, and the establishment of the National Higher Education Fund (NHEF) to help pay the students' admission fees.

"Students can also opt for other alternatives including teaching colleges and polytechnics," he said.

Explaining the confusion sparked by the newspaper

report, Musa said it was partly due to the ministry's unintentional delay in clearing up the mistake.

He said Higher Education Department director Prof Dr Hassan Said sent an explanation letter to the editor's column after the publication of the article.

"He did not expect the matter to turn serious, until I told him in the evening to call for a press conference.

"However, since the next three days were holidays, it could not be held," he said.

Musa said during the holidays, the ministry contacted several reporters in a bid to clear up the confusion, but stopped when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made a statement on Sunday.

He said it is not wise to coincide the ministry's statement with the prime minis-

ter's statement, and the ministry had instead decided to send an official to brief Mahathir on the issue.

"On Monday, the ministry parliamentary secretary (Datuk Mahadzir Mohd Khir) went to Universiti Utara Malaysia where the prime minister was to give an explanation.

"However, he (Mahadzir) was only able to give the explanation after the prime minister had made another statement on the issue while he was there," Musa said.

Due to the predicament, the ministry could only issue the explanation earliest yesterday, he said.

The explanation was made by Hassan when he opened a colloquium in Genting Highlands, said Musa, in which he told reporters that all bumiputra places in public universities have been filled.