

Base entry on merit: Gerakan

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Koh welcomes PM's suggestion for varsity admission

By Seema Viswanathan

PETALING JAYA, Sun: Gerakan urged the government today to seriously reconsider the party's proposal made more than 11 years ago that university admissions be based on merit and need.

Its vice-president, Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, said: "We said to the National Economic Consultative Council in 1990, that in respect of the economy and education, the principle of merit and need should be applied.

"The council accepted the proposal in principle but it has yet to be used in a workable plan. Perhaps, it's time to review it."

He told delegates to the Selangor Gerakan conference that the party will prepare a new working paper on the proposal "as soon as possible" after extensive discussions are held with party members and the public.

Using an old battle cry from his Gerakan Youth days, "Merit not *kulit*, and need not creed", Koh said admission into universities based on race alone was unequitable and would not foster unity.

"We don't want either of the two extremes - cold-blooded meritocracy or hot-blooded affirmative action based on race.

"We want a developed, caring society. If based on merit alone, there will be development without unity, and if based solely on race, there will be unity but at the expense of de-

velopment," he said.

Koh, who is also the Penang chief minister, suggested that computerised databases be developed for every applicant, showing his family background and academic performance.

"The decision should be made based on how good a student the candidate is and whether he is disad-

vantaged economically, socially or physically.

"A student from a poor family with good grades should be chosen over one from a rich family with poor grades, regardless of race."

He welcomed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Saturday that university admis-

sions may be based on merit, to prompt Malay students into doing better.

"It appears that the top leaders are rethinking the system, which is why we reiterate our proposal.

"We are not asking for immediate changes to the system. This will take time, but we should start thinking about how to implement it," Koh said.