

PM to explain varsity merit system at special meetings

STAR

2 AUG 2001

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KUALA LUMPUR: Umno will hold special meetings of grassroots members for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to explain the Government's proposal to implement the merit system for universities.

Party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the need for the meeting and the explanation was decided at the Umno man-

agement meeting yesterday evening.

Asked when the meetings would be convened, he said: "As soon as possible, the faster the better."

Party secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob later confirmed that the meetings would be held within this month.

Abdullah said the issue was explained by Dr Mahathir at the Cabinet meeting yesterday and after a brief discussion,

all the ministers supported the proposal and the statements made by the Prime Minister over the past week.

"The proposal was made to ensure Malays do not lag behind in education. The rise and fall of the Malay race depends on their academic performance.

"If the performance of Malay students is bad, what will happen to the Malays? How will they fare with greater global competition now that

the economy is moving towards a knowledge-based platform?" he asked.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir's contention arose from his dissatisfaction with the academic performance of Malay students in universities. This feeling, he added, was shared by other party leaders.

On certain quarters wanting to set conditions for Dr Mahathir to meet US president George W. Bush, Abdullah said the Prime Minister had

never indicated he wanted to meet Bush.

In light of this, he said there was no necessity for the United States to set any conditions.

Abdullah was asked to comment on reports that the United States had set three conditions for such a meeting, one being that the Malaysian Government should treat opposition parties better.

Abdullah said the United States seemed unaware of the freedom that opposition par-

ties enjoyed to the point of setting up governments in states they had won.

"I don't understand what they want but I know it is the sentiment of only select groups," he said.

On PAS' refusal to abide by the Government's decision to ban political *ceramah*, Abdullah said the Government had decided on this and the police had also made their stand.

"We will enforce what we have decided," he said.