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Academics who fail to truly help Malay students

M.A.

I READ with great relief and admiration the courage shown by Dr Mahathir in saying aloud the long awaited phrase - "meritocracy as a means of helping future Malays".

As a retired professor who had served in several local universities I whole-heartedly applaud our PM's unyielding efforts and commitment to help the Malay race. But this time around not in the conventional hand-out or subsidy-laden fashion.

I do however disagree with the spot-on blame that has been directed solely at the Malay students in our universities.

The popular quick-fix solution put forth by many of our leaders currently seems bent on advocating that only high-achievers and seriously committed Malay students be given places in the universities.

Erroneously many hold to the belief that only through such means that we can produce credible Malay graduates capable of competing on a level playing field in their real world of work upon graduation.

This much-touted belief is not without its flaws and over-simplified.

In this era of democratisation and rapid growth of higher education, such measures would prove counter-productive to Malays in the long term and can ultimately threaten the racial harmony of this country.

Many developed nations of the world today keep entry qualifications to university education to the barest minimum but stand firm on ensuring that once at the university, these students must show the highest academic achievement as stipulated by the university senate.

With my years of experience at local universities and as a member of the senate, I can state with absolute certainty that such demand on academic performance is not strictly adhered to and often compromised by the university senate.

Lecturers, heads of departments and deans often took pains to compromise on the academic performance of their Malay students by the purposeful rigging of low grades so as to save them from being terminated from their studies.

Consequently, these student were lulled into complacency and mediocrity or the "cukup makan" syndrome set in among the Malay students.

Strange but true, such acts of "compassion" and compromise are often hailed by the university senate as a means of "helping" the Malay students.

Ironically, in all those years of service as an academician, I personally would only feel that I have in fact helped my own students, regardless of racial origins, when I resorted to contrary actions; by being absolutely uncompromising when it comes to academic assessment of my students.

Over the years, I have also came across many of my own students whom I have personally failed and terminated from going further in their university education, emerging later in life as very successful members of the society making significant contributions to this country in their own ways.

My point here is for the Government not to put the blame squarely on Malay students at our universities for their poor performance and sparing the rod on the Malay academics who have obviously failed to appreciate the true spirit and meaning of "helping the Malays".

Perhaps, one sure way to address this issue and send the right signal to

those academics at the local universities is to introduce and seriously execute the tenureship system in all academic appointments so that a more responsible and accountable "hire and fire" mechanism can be put in place for the good of all.