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Parliament-Seats

CONFUSION BLAMED FOR CONTROVERSY OVER VACANT BUMIPUTERA VARSITY SEATS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 9 (Bernama) -- The issue over more than 7,000 unfilled Bumiputera quota seats in public universities arose due to confusion and the delay in the Education Ministry explaining the true situation owing to the long weekend holidays, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said today.

He said the reported figure of 7,168 unfilled Bumiputera seats did not exist as it was erroneously reported by the media arising from a confusion on the student intake target through the public universities joint selection meeting.

"The target was 38,000 places (for the 2001/2002 academic year) and the intake through the joint selection was 30,832 students. The difference of 7,168 places have been thought to be vacancies," he said in explaining the issue at the Dewan Rakyat today.

The explanation was given under Standing Orders 14 (1)(I) following the May 3 newspaper report which stated that there were 7,186 vacant places under the Bumiputera quota in public universities as they were not taken up by Bumiputera students.

Earlier, Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail told the House that he had rejected a motion dated May 4 by Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka) to discuss the issue in yesterday's sitting of the Dewan Rakyat because the Education Ministry planned to give an explanation on the actual situation.

Musa said the intake figure did not include the 8,365 matriculation students taken in before the joint selection.

Based on the figure, the total intake was 39,197 students, up 1,197 students from the initial target, he said.

Speaking to reporters later at the Parliament lobby, Musa said his ministry was late in clearing the confusion as last Saturday, being the first Saturday of the month was a holiday, followed by Sunday and Wesak Day public holiday.

He said the Higher Education Department Director, Prof Dr Hassan Said, had planned to call for a media conference on Saturday but Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had made a statement on the issue.

He said his ministry did not want to issue a statement before explaining the matter to Dr Mahathir first.

"Hence, the appropriate day was yesterday (Tuesday)," he said.

Musa said the issue should be considered resolved and should not be disputed anymore following the explanation by him and Dr Hassan.

He, however, said the problem of high achievers not being able to enter public universities cannot be avoided as long as the universities could not take in all of them.

"I think this polemic will recur. But if they understand, they should not worry as there are many other ways, including pursuing their studies in colleges, polytechnics and private universities.

"The government is providing study loans through the National Higher Education Fund Corporation for those studying in private universities," he said.

Asked to comment on the fate of 340 of the 500 SPM students with excellent results who have not been offered places in government universities, Musa said the students would be guaranteed a place to proceed to Form Six.

He, however, said the ministry would give special consideration to 160

students who scored 10As and more in SPM to enter public universities.

-- BERNAMA

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