

25/05/2001

Gender gap in varsities (HL)

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SHAH ALAM, Thurs. - Revealing that the current female to male ratio at public universities is 65:35, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said a research committee set up to determine the reasons behind the phenomena had completed its report.

Musa said he would announce the findings of the research committee soon.

"The research committee is headed by a Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia lecturer and its members comprise representatives from, among others, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Malaya."

Musa was speaking to reporters after a visit to two blocks of teachers' apartments at Sekolah Menengah Teknik Shah Alam Batu Tiga today. The apartments were built under a privatisation agreement dated Feb 9, 1998.

The project was awarded to Encorp Systembilt Sdn Bhd to design, finance and construct 10,000 units of teachers' housing to be located throughout Malaysia.

Musa said he would meet tomorrow with the task force, established by Umno recently, to come up with measures to check the decline.

"I will brief them on the findings of the research committee."

The task force, which is chaired by Musa, comprises Umno supreme council members. Its recommendations may be adopted by the Government.

The "gender gap" in public universities is becoming increasingly acute. For the new 2001/2002 academic session, many universities saw a much higher number of female compared to male students.

In Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for instance, eight out of 10 students are females.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had expressed concern over the situation last week, saying that if it persisted, women might one day find it difficult to find suitable partners.

Meanwhile ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Mahadzir Mohd Khir, in the Dewan Negara today, said females were more responsible and motivated, more concerned about academic qualifications, and more disciplined and systematic.

Mahadzir said the number students enrolled for diplomas for the 2000/2001 intake was 80,083 of which 44,744 were females and 35,339 males.

Out of the 170,607 students enrolled for degrees, 102,038 (59.8 per cent) are females and 68,569 (40.2 per cent) are males.

Replying to Senator Datuk Christine Tibok-Vanhouten, Mahadzir said males, however, outnumbered females at the post-graduate level.

Of the 21,908 students enrolled for Masters, 11,974 (54.7 per cent) are males and 9,934 (45.3 per cent) females. At the doctorate level, 3,100 (65.4 per cent) are males and 1,110 (34.6 per cent) females.

On another issue, Musa said the Government would endeavour to increase the number of Bumiputera students at private higher educational institutions.

"Therefore, the ratio of Bumiputera to non-Bumiputera enrolment at private educational institutions might one day be 55:45."

Now, only 10 per cent of students at private institutions are Bumiputeras.

On the teachers' apartments, Musa said it was part of the ministry's efforts to enhance the quality of life of teachers.

"We take care of teachers so that they will take care of their students."

Musa said if the welfare of teachers was not taken care of, the process of education would be adversely affected.

"By 2005, some 70,000 units of teachers' housing will be built. Encorp Systembilt is one of the companies awarded the project to build teachers' apartments."

Musa said every State had their own criteria of selection for teachers eligible to stay at teachers' quarters. "Preference will be given to those with families. And while the teachers would not have to pay rent, they would not be given housing allowances."

The 36 units in Shah Alam were the first to be delivered to the ministry by Encorp Systembilt. The remaining units will be completed by May 2002.