

30/07/2001

## Koh calls for balanced policy

Patvinder Singh

PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Gerakan yesterday restated a proposal it first made 12 years ago - that entry into public universities should be based on merit and need.

By saying this, its vice-president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the party was "sticking its head out again" to generate a public debate on the matter.

He said this system, which would provide the most opportunities for the greatest number of students, would make for a competitive and caring society.

He urged the Government to look at the concept closely and work towards implementing it eventually.

The system, he said, was better than having a system where "one side is cold-blooded meritocracy and the other side hot-headed affirmative action based on race that can be very sensitive".

"If based on merit and need, the system would be more positive," Koh told reporters after opening the Selangor Gerakan Delegates' 2001 Conference at the Civic Centre auditorium here.

The proposed system would balance the performance of students with their socio-economic background and interests.

"Computers now have the capacity to input large amounts of information. We are suggesting a system that takes into account students' academic performance, their socio-economic background, their academic interests, and other relevant information.

"There could then be preliminary selection before the application goes to a selection committee."

The selection system would be more transparent and it would also resolve the matter of race.

Koh was asked if his statement was in reply to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Friday that the Government intended to introduce several radical measures, including a possible reduction in the number of Bumiputera students in universities over a certain period, to check the moral decay and lacklustre performance of Malay students.

"We will (then) find some faculties (in universities) with no Malay students at all. Perhaps for one year, university admission is to be based on meritocracy and we will see what happens," Dr Mahathir had said then.

Koh said the proposed system was an "indirect reply" to the Prime Minister's statement.

"Our proposal is now more refined and has a better chance of success due to the greater capacity of computers (to collate all student information)," he said.

Koh said Gerakan was re-stating its position on admissions to public universities as top leaders in the country may be doing a re-think on the present system.

On specific steps the party would take on the matter, he said Gerakan called on its members to debate the issue. Recommendations would then be made to the Government on implementing it.

"We are starting a discussion. This may take some time but let's try explaining the system rather than rushing into it," Koh said.

Earlier, in his speech to conference delegates, he said the country was at a cross-roads with the challenges posed by globalisation, the World Trade Organisation and the Asean Free Trade Area.

The economic cake must grow for the benefit of the nation, and the party and its leaders were working towards that.