

09/08/2001

Meritocracy in stages (HL)

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Two weeks after bringing up the subject, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said a system for selecting Bumiputera students for admission into universities based on merit would be introduced.

This, however, would not affect quotas for university entry, but the Prime Minister said that admission requirements for certain courses for them would be tightened.

The move is intended to encourage Bumiputera students to seek academic excellence. It also serves as a warning for them that they cannot expect unending and unqualified support in the field of education.

This process will be carried out in stages until the performance of Bumiputera students is on par with those of the other races.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a Press conference after a special briefing for Umno officials on his earlier statement on meritocracy pertaining to university entry.

The Umno president first referred to this after chairing the party's supreme council meeting on July 27 which discussed at length the problems of moral decadence and poor performance among Malay students.

Dr Mahathir said admission into universities based on merit could not be implemented at "one shot" as the number of Malay students would be affected.

"Therefore, we will introduce the merit system in stages, involving a small number at first so that Malay students will concentrate on their studies and perform well academically."

He said the move would cover all faculties, including arts courses.

Asked to elaborate on how the new system would be implemented, Dr Mahathir said: "Let's say Malay students now need 7As to enter the medical faculty. We should raise this to 8As. I am confident if they study hard, they will be able to get 8As."

On when this would be implemented, he said it would be done as soon as possible, with next year's university admission being the earliest.

"We are giving them the warning now. If they want to enter universities, study hard from now on and do not indulge in unproductive and unhealthy activities," he said, adding that those found doing so could be expelled.

Dr Mahathir said the Government strove to increase the number of Malay students in universities but it did not want this to be achieved at the expense of quality.

"We want the Malay quota in universities to be filled but it is no use if even the mediocre can gain entry. It is all right if the quota is not met as long as those entering are students of higher quality."

On whether the merit system would also be implemented for admission into matriculation programmes, Dr Mahathir said Malay students would not be able to enter if they did not do well.

"We have no intention to deny them admission but only to ensure better results. The programme will stay but we want to see them perform better."

He said the root of the problem could be traced to students being led astray by some teachers, especially those teaching religion.

Instead of teaching religion, students were taught politics of hatred against the Government and certain leaders, thus affecting their studies and academic performance.

"The students could not focus on their studies when they are taught this culture of hatred. As a result they cannot get good results to enter

universities, and the requirements for them have to be lowered."

On action that could be taken against these teachers, Dr Mahathir said the matter was being looked into.

"If they are not interested to teach religion, they might as well stop doing so," he said, adding that some university lecturers were also involved in propagating anti-government sentiments.

On whether these teachers were members of opposition parties, he said although this could not be ascertained, the fact remained that students could not focus on their studies because of interference.