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Perking up performance

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad came out strongly to warn Bumiputera students on July 27 that he would reduce university places reserved for them if they did not take their studies seriously.

He said he would take radical action against those students who took for granted their admission to universities.

It has been proposed that new students sign a pledge that they would concentrate on their studies and show results, otherwise they could be disciplined and even "sacked".

This implies that the students could be dismissed from universities even before they are asked to leave by the university authorities for failing their academic examinations.

For instance, if they are found to be demonstrating in the streets or agitating and creating student unrest, then they could be deemed to qualify for dismissal.

He proposed that a special panel be set up, comprising volunteers concerned with the poor academic performance of Bumiputera students, to study the problems and to make recommendations on how to improve the performance of Bumiputera students.

But this problem of academic under-performance and poor discipline need not be confined only to Bumiputera students. There could well be cases of poor performance among Chinese and particularly Indian students.

Hence this problem should not be regarded as a purely Bumiputera problem but a national problem. All those who under-perform will need to be observed so that national productivity and unity are enhanced.

Hence, the panel could first concentrate on Bumiputera students, but it should study other ethnic groups sooner or later if it is to be comprehensive from a national perspective.

It is important that this panel is established for hopefully, it will be able to identify, in a professional way, why Bumiputra students perform poorly despite the great amount of Government investment in their education and welfare.

Firstly, the panel should ascertain the full extent of the assertion that Bumiputera students are doing badly. How poorly are they performing? How do they compare with other students with similar socio-economic backgrounds?

We need to know the size of the problem before action can be taken to resolve the problem.

Secondly, how much political interference is there in the education system to subvert the students from their real purpose, which is to study diligently to prepare themselves for leadership in the various fields of study to serve the nation?

Where political parties and politicians are found to be combining politics with teaching, then they should be disciplined.

Thirdly, is the National Development Policy giving many Bumiputera students the mindset that they will be protected right through life and so they do not have to study as much as those who are not given special privileges?

If this is the case, then Bumiputera students have to be encouraged to compete. Those who perform well should be rewarded on merit and those who are indifferent to studies should be pulled up and given extra coaching.

If they still do not respond, they should be considered for technical

education, which they may find more interesting than academic learning.

Fourthly, are there too many Bumiputera teachers in the education system? Are there Bumiputera teachers who believe in sparing the rod and spoiling the child?

In other words, is discipline slack or even lacking? It would be better to Malaysianise the education system in the National Schools so that a multiethnic teaching community is able to foster multiracial values.

This will enable Bumiputera students to become less pampered and hence more competitive.

Finally, the quality of teachers should be generally upgraded. It would appear that there are many teachers who teach because they cannot find other suitable employment on graduation.

Similarly, the curricula should be reviewed and revised to make them much more relevant and interesting to the students.

Some of our syllabi and teaching methods could be modernised with the greater use of information technology and computers.

Although a high proportion of the Budget is expended on education, the allocations have to be increased if the salaries of teachers are to be raised and the facilities expanded.

Having said all that, the Government must emphasise productivity and quality in the education delivery system. There will be no purpose in increasing salaries and budget allocations if the teachers are not going to be judged and rewarded according to performance and merit.

I believe that with the benefit of a professional study and the right approach, the academic performance of Bumiputera students will be greatly improved.

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