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`Move not a punishment' (HL)

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KAJANG, Tues. - Plans to admit Bumiputera students into public universities on the basis of merit is not intended as a punishment for those opposing the Government.

Dismissing claims that this was the reason behind the proposed system for university admission, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the move was being considered by the Government following the continuous poor showing by Bumiputera students.

He said statistics on their performance highlighted the need for drastic measures to arrest the decline.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself has expressed dissatisfaction on the performance of Bumiputera students. We need to do something to enhance the standard," he told reporters after opening a convention organised by the Federation of Malay Students Union (GPMS) at Universiti Tenaga Nasional, near here.

He also launched the GPMS bulletin which will be published once every two months.

On the merit-based system, Abdullah said it was being looked into by the Education Ministry.

On whether places not filled by Bumiputera students would be offered to non-Bumiputeras, he said: "It is not possible for me to comment until all details are finalised."

Abdullah said it was wrong to assume that with meritocracy, fewer Bumiputera students would make the cut.

"The opposite may happen as the open admission plans could spur them to study harder and obtain better results. Don't just think of the negative aspects."

On views that Bumiputera students did not do well in their studies due to lack of competition, Abdullah said there could also be other factors.

"There is no one problem caused by one single factor. It is always a combination of factors."

Meanwhile, Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, speaking to reporters after the launch of an information technology conference at Uniten, said it was still too premature to say which method would be adopted for the merit-based system for universities.

"We are still looking at various methods and have yet to make a decision."

He had said last week that the ministry was looking at several methods including increasing slightly the minimum entry requirements for varsity admission for Bumiputera students and ensuring students maintained a certain level of academic excellence while in university.

Earlier in his speech at the convention, Abdullah, who was GPMS president from 1962 to 1964, said the body was still relevant, especially in view of problems plaguing youths now.

If its role in 1948 - the year it was formed - was on championing the interests of Malay students and harnessing their potential, the emphasis that should be given by GPMS now was on arresting the moral decay and tackling social ills among the younger generation.

"Although it has been around for more than 50 years, an age where someone in the civil service would normally retire, GPMS cannot pence (retire).

"If it is relevant over the years after its formation, it is more

relevant now due to the new challenges and threats facing society. It should act as a catalyst in uplifting the standard of Malay students."

Abdullah said GPMS should also play a prominent role in helping to check problems like dadah addiction, juveniles committing rapes and murders, black metal and anti-religion movements. He said Malay students possessed the ability to excel in various fields, but hard work was needed before this could be realised.

He said if Malay students could be successful during the pre- and post-independence years when times were difficult, there was no reason why this could not be emulated by students today, what more with the many facilities and opportunities provided by the Government.