

29 JUN 2001  
Mahathir-University  
STUDENT SYMPOSIUM AT UM TO GO ON

BUKIT MERTAJAM, June 29 (Bernama) -- The symposium on the direction of idealism in the new millennium at Universiti Malaya scheduled to be held tomorrow will go on although the venue, Dewan Canselor, was destroyed by fire early this morning.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the organisers had been asked to find an alternative venue as the government wanted the symposium to proceed.

"We still want to proceed (with the symposium) and we may find an alternative venue unless there are too many problems which prevent us from holding it," he told reporters after attending a tea party with the people at Politeknik Seberang Perai, here today.

The symposium, to be held at the Dewan Canselor, was expected to be attended by more than 3,000 students from public and private institutions of higher learning.

However, a fire that broke out at about 3.45am today destroyed more than 80 per cent of the hall.

Asked whether there was a possibility of an act of sabotage, Dr Mahathir said the incident must be investigated and the government would not make any wild allegation on the matter.

"We don't want to blame anyone at random. We will investigate to determine who were responsible for the fire," he said.

On the call by Puteri Umno protem head Azalina Othman Said that the university's Vice Chancellor, Prof Datuk Dr Anuar Zaini Md Zain, resign in light of the various problems faced by the university currently, the Prime Minister said: "Allegations cannot be made indiscriminately concerning the problems at UM (Universiti Malaya)."

On the numerous activities by students who were anti-government such as riots, street demonstrations and the publication of newsletters criticising the government, he said: "The government spends 10 times more (on each student) compared to the tuition fees paid by the private students and it is only appropriate that they focus their attention only on their studies".

He said they should give priority to their studies and not be involved in activities that were not relevant to their studies.

"If (they are) not interested in their studies, there is no point in us giving them places in the university, we should instead give their places (in the university) to others who are interested," he said.

The Prime Minister said that there was also a tendency among students to allow themselves to be exploited by certain groups who were carrying out militant activities in the university.

"If we find that these activities are actually happening, we need to review the placement of students in the university now," he said.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said investigation on the cause of the fire was still ongoing and there had been no conclusive finding so far.

-- BERNAMA

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