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Survey to find out number of Bumi undergrads

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Umno will conduct a survey to determine the exact number of Bumiputera students pursuing tertiary education, including in private universities and abroad.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the findings would give a clearer picture on the ratio of Bumiputera students with non-Bumiputeras.

Speaking after chairing a four-hour Umno supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn, the Prime Minister said the council deliberated at length on the controversy surrounding the university quota system, which started following the failure of 500 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia top scorers to enter public universities.

Dr Mahathir explained that the Bumiputera quota in university should be viewed in totality and not only confined to public universities.

Thus, the number of Bumiputeras studying overseas and private universities should also be taken into account, he said.

"The quota for the intake into public universities is to create some balance as majority of students in private universities - where no quota is imposed - are filled by non-Bumiputeras."

Dr Mahathir said if the number of all Bumiputera students in public, private universities and those overseas were collated, their ratio would be less than 55 per cent.

This was the case despite places reserved for Bumiputera students entering public universities.

Drawing parallel to the economy, he said government assistance was given to Bumiputeras to create some balance as the community's participation in the private sector was low.

"In the economy, we used the Government to correct the imbalance. But this does not mean the private sector should not help to increase Bumiputera participation."

Dr Mahathir said that one had to view the whole thing from a wider perspective.

"Contracts given by private companies should also be taken into account, not only those awarded by the Government.

"We noticed that private companies did not give any chance to Bumiputera companies or suppliers; no contracts given or Bumiputeras hired."

The Government on its part would strive to increase the number of non-Bumiputeras in the civil service, Dr Mahathir said.

He added while Umno supported the quota system for public universities, it was not asking for similar arrangements to be used for admission into private institutions of higher learning.

"We cannot dictate on the intake of students into private institutions of higher learning where the majority of them are non-Bumiputeras, so some quota is needed for the intake of Bumiputera students into public universities."

Dr Mahathir said the council was also worried over the low number of Malay males entering universities compared to their female counterparts.

He said a task force had been set up comprising supreme council members and chaired by Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad.

It has been tasked to come up with measures to check the decline, which might be adopted by the Government.

Dr Mahathir said the anomaly had to be studied and addressed as it could

have far-reaching implications on the society in future.

"We want to know why female students are better than the males ... they attend the same schools and have the same teachers."

If this was not corrected, he expressed the fear that women would one day be more qualified than men, and "they might face difficulties in finding suitable partners".

Dr Mahathir said one of the reasons why male students performed poorer academically was because of distractions from certain quarters which affected their concentration.

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