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University students 'holding Government to ransom'

Sarban Singh

SHAH ALAM, Sat. - The proposal requiring students to enter into a pre-entry agreement with universities may be necessary as some had attempted to hold the Government to ransom by making unreasonable demands and openly declaring support for the Opposition.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said these undergraduates also subscribed to the notion that any Government would make it possible for them to enter universities because of their Bumiputera status.

"Here we are trying very hard to give them tertiary education but they hold us to ransom by saying that if we do not meet their demands, they will go and campaign for the Opposition in the kampung," he said.

He said these students also felt the money spent on them by the Government was not Government money and as such, it could not claim credit for it.

"We know it is not our money... it is the people's money. But we are the trustees (of the people)."

He said there was no place for so-called political activists in universities as those who went there did so in the pursuit of knowledge.

"We also want to see whether any other Government will allow them to enter universities as they claim is their right," he said.

He was speaking to reporters after visiting the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (Sirim) today.

He said these students had taken advantage of the Government's flexibility and goodwill which allowed them entry into universities although they were not qualified.

On July 18, Dr Mahathir said the Government would draw up a proper agreement with both university students and lecturers to ensure their seriousness in acquiring and imparting knowledge so as not to waste public money.

He said the Government was spending billions of ringgit on education and a lot was wasted, especially on Malay students who did not seem keen on studying.

Dr Mahathir said some students have become arrogant, refusing to attend lectures and were hostile towards their lecturers.

"And when they feel like coming for lectures, they sit right at the back. These are the ones who come last and leave early," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the proposal requiring students to enter into such agreements would only be implemented if students, especially the Bumiputera, continue to show lack of interest in studying upon being accepted into universities.

"Yes, we have not made a decision yet but that is our proposal ... if they are not going to study, no way are we going to accept them into our universities," he said.

Queried on views that the Government should not introduce the meritocracy system, he said this could be done if students used the opportunity while in university to concentrate on their studies.

To whether it was normal for undergraduates to have anti-establishment feelings, Dr Mahathir said this was not necessarily true.

"I was a student once but I don't remember being anti-establishment. I was anti-British yes, but not anti-establishment," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on a statement by Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor that the party was willing to drop its objective to

create an Islamic state at the Alternative Front-level but would maintain it at party-level.

"Then, why do they continue to ridicule Umno as not being sincere. We want to know what's the difference of their concept with what we do. If there isn't, then they should not cast aspersions on others," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the pledge by Pas to set up an Islamic state was only a bait to win over the Malays who were staunch Muslims.

Pas, he said, would make promises it knew could not be fulfilled.

Asked whether he had received any report from the Umno disciplinary board's investigation over allegations by Kuantan Umno division head Datuk Fauzi Abdul Rahman that money politics was rife in the recent branch elections, Dr Mahathir said he has only received a preliminary report.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir commended Sirim for its research work.

"I think they are on the right track. I am also happy that they have made progress in many areas ... but I am sure they can do more," he added.