

08/05/2001

University seats only to be filled this year

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SINTOK, Mon. - The proposal to allow non-Bumiputeras to get unfilled university seats reserved for Bumiputeras is just for this year's intake, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"It (the proposal) is for this year only ... next year we'll see.

"We'll give the seats to those who can fill it," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would not prevent eligible students from pursuing education as all the facilities were already in place and those who wanted to study would be given a chance to do so.

He said this when asked to elaborate on his statement yesterday that he was leaving it to the people to decide whether there should be a quota on the intake of students into public universities.

"If the people feel the quota is not good and do not want it anymore, then the Government can do away with it," he was quoted as saying after opening an exhibition at the Summit USJ yesterday.

Speaking after attending a dialogue with some 400 students from various Institutions of higher learning at Universiti Utara Malaysia here today, Dr Mahathir said the Government could not prevent others from pursuing their studies just because Bumiputeras could not fill their quota of seats.

"Some (students) are obviously not interested to study and because they are not interested they cannot expect to say no to others," he said.

On the actual number of seats reserved for Bumiputeras that remained unfilled, Dr Mahathir said:

"We don't know the actual figure and a detailed (number) should first be obtained."

The quota issue was among questions raised during the question and answer session between Dr Mahathir and students earlier.

The student who raised the question had called on Dr Mahathir not to allow non-Bumiputeras to fill the seats reserved for Bumiputeras.

However, the Prime Minister said this was not the right thing to do as it was unfair and would result in a brain drain from the country.

He said there was a possibility the Government might lose support of some Malays following the proposal but it could not deprive deserving students from pursuing their education.

"This is a possibility that I can see. However, the people should not rush to make a stand which will not benefit anyone, especially the country."

On a proposal by Gerakan vice-president Dr Tan Kee Kwong to allow non-Bumiputeras to be admitted to Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Dr Mahathir said:

"Yes, but we have always accepted the fact that because of certain weaknesses of Bumiputeras, special treatment should be given to them.

"If the principle of throwing out the weak is followed then over time the unfortunate will become more unfortunate because they will never be able to catch up with others."

The Prime Minister said the different communities in Malaysia had always accepted the need for the Bumiputeras to be given preferential treatment.

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