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View merit-based admissions policy positively, says Musa

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad said the Government's proposal for merit-based selection of Malay students for public universities should be viewed positively.

Selection on the basis of academic excellence, and not quota, was intended to push Malay students to pay more attention to achieving excellence in education.

"The community as well as the Malay political organisations should look at this matter positively... We should not view every proposal negatively.

"Such thinking should be discarded," he told reporters at the Ministry's Family Day at Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Kepong today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Friday said the Government would take radical steps in handling issues involving university students. This included the possibility of a merit-based system for admission into public institutions of higher learning.

The policy may be needed to remind Malay students not to neglect the opportunities given to them by the Government, said Musa.

He said there were students who had wasted the opportunity for higher education given to them via the quota system.

"The agreement was not easy to reach and therefore we should not take it for granted. People will demand its abolition if the opportunities are not used to the fullest."

Asked whether such a move would be politicised, he said he expected that to happen.

"There will be objections, I'm sure. When we try to improve a situation and try to make the community realise its responsibilities, there will certainly be people politicising the issue," he said.

Asked whether the merit policy would be implemented by the next university intake, Musa said: "We will look into it."

On the proposal for students to enter into a pre-entry agreement with universities, he said this should be done right away as many students were involved in activities that had nothing to do with academics.

"Therefore, it is necessary that these students be given a warning by being asked to make a written promise, which is more than just the usual oath," he said.

Musa said amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971, in a move to deter students from engaging in negative activities, would be tabled in Parliament's next session in October.

In Kuantan, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said today the problem of Malay undergraduates not concentrating on their studies would, if not addressed, result in the community losing out in the long run. This could mean fewer Malay graduates in specialised disciplines which were in demand.

"We also want to address the problem of Malay students graduating in disciplines which are not compatible with contemporary and future needs."

Khalil said: "We want the Malay undergraduates to focus on their studies because it is their academic achievement that will determine their future."

Khalil, who is also Umno secretary-general, said the party's supreme council, meeting on Friday, considered the status of Malay undergraduates, admission to universities, their interest and how much time they devoted to studies and activities out of campus.

"We have established that too many of them do not focus on their studies and this warrants attention from Umno and Government leaders. So, the supreme council makes several proposals to the Government," he said.

The Prime Minister's statement was in line with the decision of the supreme council.

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