

PM: Merit system stays

STAR 20 MAY 2002

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SHAH ALAM: The merit system for admission to local public universities is likely to be retained next year even though it has been questioned by some quarters within the government.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government could not risk losing credibility if it scrapped the system.

"We have made a promise to use the merit system for admission to local universities. We cannot possibly change this if we find the system has resulted in more bumiputra students being qualified and admitted to the universities.

"If we changed the system, we will not be credible anymore," he said when opening the MIC's 56th AGM at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah building here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the result of the merit system implemented last year was not what the Government had expected.

"Our aim was to give a wake-up call to bumiputra students.

"They have been too dependent on the quota system (which guarantees them a certain percentage of places in local public universities)," he said.

"So when we introduced the merit system, we thought the number of Malay or bumiputra students will be reduced. But to our surprise, their number has increased."

He said the result of the merit system showed many bumiputra students had been disadvantaged by the quota system.

Earlier in his presidential

address, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the party hoped the Government would review the quota system to allow Indians more time "to adjust".

He said the merit system had resulted in a drop in the percentage of Indian students in local public universities, from 8% to 4.7%.

Dr Mahathir said one reason why the number of

bumiputra students who gained admission to local public universities had increased was because many sat for the Sijil Tinggi Peperiksaan Malaysia (STPM) compared to other races.

"But I am confident next year more Chinese and Indian students will take the STPM and fare better," he added.

Despite the increased number of bumiputra students in

local public universities, Dr Mahathir said they were still lagging behind students from other races.

"If we take into consideration the number of non-bumiputra students at local private universities and universities overseas, the numbers of bumiputra studying at tertiary level is still low compared to other races," he said.

In the United States, he said bumiputra students made up only 800 of the 17,000 students there.

Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted students in all universities to reflect the racial composition of the country.

"What is happening now is that more than 90% of local private university students are non-Malays," he added.