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PM: Support for tertiary education to continue

M.K. Megan; Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government will continue to provide tertiary education to the young even though some of them may not appreciate this.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today it was important to educate these students, find out what their qualms were and to understand their expectations.

"I'm sad if they are not thankful and think that the Government's contribution is insufficient," Abdullah said in a live TV3 interview from Kepala Batas.

"Whether they are thankful or not, we have a responsibility to continue our efforts to nurture and guide the young with the hope that they will eventually change their attitude.

"It is our responsibility to try to understand them by actively engaging in dialogues and discussions."

He stressed that he could understand the mind and attitude of the undergraduates since he had served as a Youth Department director many years ago.

The Prime Minister, in the onehour interview, was asked a series of questions ranging from the BN's move to field religious figures, last minute campaign tactics, his expectations of elected representatives and his anti-corruption drive.

He also took questions sent by e-mail.

On Umno's move to field candidates with religious backgrounds, Abdullah said that it was not a co-incidence as the party wanted a mix of professionals from all fields.

"We are intentionally fielding candidates with various qualifications and background, including religious scholars, to have a formidable team."

Asked about voter sentiment in Kelantan and Terengganu which showed that a portion of them would rather vote for the Opposition and endure poverty rather than vote the BN and enjoy development as they feared they were answerable in the hereafter, Abdullah said he too had to face the hereafter.

"I will also be questioned in akhirat.

"Poverty is not part of Islam. We cannot simply accept the fact that we are poor and do nothing about it.

"We must be progressive, successful and be able to spread our teachings.

"It is inevitable that we have to face development.

"If you are a good Muslim, knowledgeable and abide by the teachings then it's good for Islam and Muslims.

"There are many Muslim nations which remain Islamic in name only, and they are poor, powerless and incapable of defending the religion itself. It's humiliating."

In an earlier interview with ntv7, he urged the people to exercise their rights as responsible citizens and reminded them that voting was vital to ensure a Government which truly represented the people.

"Think carefully and decide who you are going to choose.

"Take part in the polls because we want the highest voter turnout, we want a strong Government based on a strong turnout," he said.

"If the turnout is low then the strength of the Government would be questionable.

"We need a strong mandate from you to serve you effectively."

Abdullah reminded the people not to cast sympathy votes as propagated by

the Opposition as sympathy would not serve any purpose.

Asked to comment on the Opposition appeal to the people of Kedah and Perlis to vote the BN into Parliament but deliver the state seats to them, Abdullah said it was not practical and urged the voters not to divide their support and instead give the BN a strong mandate.

On BN candidates riding on his "Mr Clean Image" and that posters with his portrait are all over the country, he said:

"Even in previous elections, posters carrying Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's picture were everywhere.

"This is because the leader of the party which successfully forms the Government would be the central figure of the administration.

"So it is about letting the people know who will be leading the Government. It depends much on the leader."

He added that the people's response towards the BN in Terengganu and Kelantan was very favourable.

"If we come to power it would be easier as we can share same strategies to develop the two States."

He cited Sabah as an example of a development module under the BN after it was recaptured from the Opposition.