

**DPM's matriculation offer provokes questions**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**July 5, 2012**  
**By Nicholas Wong**

Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's Monday announcement of a one-off offer to 557 Indian students for spots in matriculation courses has provoked several questions.

Following a request from MIC president G Palanivel last year, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak announced 1,000 places for Indians in government matriculation courses.

Of the 1,539 students offered places this year, only 943 had been accepted, and so the one-off offer to 557 eligible Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) students were made to fill the vacancies.

However, critics have questioned the need for racial quotas and why Muhyiddin termed the offer a 'one-off'.

Author Uthaya Sankar SB called the step a "positive development" but noted that it did not guarantee deserving students an offer in the future.

He also pressed on the need to pay attention to students' qualifications rather than racial quotas, especially if the latter would be used as "bait".

Shoving problems to the future

"The education minister said the offer this time was a 'one-off' - overall it does not mean it will solve problems in the future.

"On the topic of education, what needs to be paid attention to is the students' qualifications and not racial quotas. It is even worse if that (the quota) is used as 'bait' to fish for votes," he told Malaysiakini.

If the government is serious about meeting people's education needs, then there is no need for 'one-off' offers for those who merit the chance to further their studies, Uthaya added.

Hindraf leader P Uthayakumar also dismissed the raising of quotas as a solution to Indians' educational woes, saying that space should be open to all qualified students regardless of race.

"To me, a permanent solution would be offers to students with 5As and above (for SPM). All forms of race-based policies should be abolished," he said when contacted by Malaysiakini.

He also expressed scepticism on the quota increase, challenging the government to make public the list of accepted students to prove it had kept its word.

Fraud on community charge

"Why not make the list public on the Education Ministry's website? We do not know whether it is true or not," he said.

Because the same problems are not addressed, he related, Hindraf need only "fill in the blanks" with dates and figures on the same complaint letters they send to the prime

minister every year.

PKR vice-president N Surendran also expressed confusion over the offer, saying, "Why is it a one-off? What happens to the next batch?"

"It is nothing short of practising fraud on the Indian community."

The move is clearly an election ploy and akin to cash handouts for votes, he said, adding that he was "shocked" and "amazed" over the issue.

"Every qualified student should have place in matriculation courses irrespective of race. No student should be deprived," he said in a phone interview with Malaysiakini.

He added that the focus on matriculation courses does not take into account students who require other skills, such as vocational training.

As a result, students who are unable to receive training and find jobs take to crime instead, he argued.

MIC blur on issue

Rising to the defence of Muhyiddin's announcement was MIC secretary-general S Murugesan.

An MIC official who spoke on Murugesan's behalf said that the party considered the 557 offer to be the last chance to fill up the vacant slots, rather than a suggestion that fewer places would be reserved next year.

However, he conceded it was only the party's understanding, and that only the deputy prime minister could confirm this, he told Malaysiakini.

Meanwhile, MIC will continue to lobby for more places for Indians in matriculation courses annually.

NONEMIC Youth chief T Mohan (right) also applauded the move, saying it "showed the prime minister's commitment" to the Indian community.

He also fully agreed with critics' suggestion of opening places to all students scoring sufficiently well in SPM, adding that there were other issues that need to be considered.

Some students may not score quite as high as others because they lack access to extra facilities, yet they may be just as deserving, for instance.

"So we have to find a way to get these students in also," he said.

He also pushed back against the suggestion that vocational education opportunities were lacking, saying there were many such schools.

Those with no interest in white-collar jobs could always get the training needed to be a blue-collar worker, he said.

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