

Bumi varsity quota not racist, says Dr M
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Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the opportunity given to more bumiputeras to enter public universities should not be considered as a racist act.

The former prime minister said the move was to ensure a balanced racial development so that the bumiputeras were not left behind in the mainstream education, which could have negative repercussions.

He said that at the private institutions of higher learning, which now numbered nearly the same as the public institutions of higher learning, the bumiputera enrolment was very small, only in the region of 10 percent, while the rest was made up of the other races because many bumiputeras could not afford the fees.

"If we conduct a census of the number of students in the government and private universities, there are more non-bumiputera students. That's why we give attention and more places to bumiputeras," he said in his keynote address, entitled 'UUM 25 Years Expectation vs Reality', at the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Alumni Convention 2009 here.

"So we should not feel guilty (just) because we have places for the bumiputeras. We have a right to attain a position that is on par in this country. We want reasonable rights," he said.

Mahathir said the affirmative policy under the New Economic Policy to bring the bumiputeras into the country's mainstream development in various fields, including education, was not something extreme because although bumiputeras made up about 60 percent of the population, the set quota was only 30 percent.

"This is not racism... we only ask for half of what we should be demanding. This shows that we are not racist... in fact to get 30 percent is not easy," he said.

He said that if there was no balance, those left behind would feel hatred and jealousy and might act irrationally, and this was what the country wanted to avoid.

Other races not sidelined

Mahathir added that the extra attention and opportunities given to the bumiputeras did not mean that the other races were sidelined.

He also said that it was important for the bumiputeras to have the knowledge in running a business because many of them did not use the money as capital or to invest but to shop.

"We must change the bumiputera mindset. The money will bring returns when invested and this can enhance their wealth. Normally they spend when they have money... often more than the money available and this causes problems."

On the UUM, Mahathir said the aspiration of its establishment had been achieved as was evident from the success in producing bumiputera graduates as well of graduates of other races in management but it was still not enough.

"The UUM's future still hinges on efforts in capacity building, especially for the bumiputeras, in business," he said.

He said students in management finance and accounting must be taught to have the right mindset, strong resilience as well as the intricacies to be successful in business and other fields.

Mahathir also hoped that one day there would be a university town in Sintok, where the UUM is located, like the university towns in Cambridge and Oxford.

- *Bernama*

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