

## MATRICULATION ROW

# PM defends Maszlee amid calls for minister to quit

**PETALING JAYA:** Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has defended Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik for linking the matriculation quota intake issue with that of language requirements for jobs.

Dr Mahathir said he did not see any problem with Maszlee since the latter took over the portfolio last year.

"I don't see any problem with him, except for the controversial 'black shoes' ruling for school children.

"Just because he talked about race, it does not mean that he was being racist. He should stay (as minister)," he said at a press con-

ference after chairing Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia's Supreme Council meeting yesterday.

He was commenting on a recent online petition calling for Maszlee to be removed from the position.

Maszlee had defended the matriculation programme's preference for Bumiputera students, saying those calling for the pre-university course to be opened to other races should also address the unfair job market dominated by a particular race.

A petition calling for Maszlee to be replaced as education minister had since garnered more than 110,000 signatories.

Dr Mahathir said it was normal to talk about one's own race.

"In our party (Pakatan Harapan), we also talk about the interests of our respective parties; the Chinese talk about Chinese, the Malays talk about Malays, the same goes for the Indians, Kadazans and Ibans.

"But in the end, they are all Malaysians. You cannot question their nationality.

"Race is different, but we need to make sure that we receive support from all.

"We must win the support of the Bumiputeras, which is crucial right now as Umno and Pas have been working together, us-

ing race and religion to gain support.

"If we do not explain our stand on race, we will not win in the next general election."

Dr Mahathir, who is also Bersatu chairman, was asked to comment on the new party, Putra, set up by Datuk Ibrahim Ali, who is also president of Malay rights group Perkasa.

Dr Mahathir, in a sarcastic tone, "welcomed" Putra's establishment and even more Malay and Bumiputera-based parties.

"The more the merrier, as this proves that there is no single Malay party that has the biggest majority.

"If we can establish 100 parties, all the better. With that, Malays will be divided into 100 parties.

"Despite having a 60 per cent majority, Malays are divided into four (parties).

"It's fine if that is what Malays want."

The Registry of Societies had, on May 8, approved Putra's establishment.

It was set up in August last year, with the aim of serving as an alternative for Malays following the 14th General Election.

The party said it would champion the rights of Malays and Islam.