

■ **Medical places:** Cabinet to find a solution

PM sympathises with top students

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■ **From Hardev Kaur in Shanghai**
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THE top-scoring students denied medical courses in public universities have an ally in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said yesterday that they should not be deprived of the chance to continue their education. "I think we should support them."

He said he had some ideas on how to unravel the situation but wanted to raise them with the Cabinet.

"Let us discuss first and find a way and then an announcement will be

made," he told reporters on the last day of his five-day official visit to China.

He was asked to comment on the plight of the 128 students who failed to get places to study medicine despite having the maximum Cumulative Grade Point Average of 4.0.

Many of these students and their parents had appealed to the Higher Education Ministry, while others turned to the media and politicians, some of whom have suggested that more places be made available in medical faculties.

But the ministry has said the shortage of medical lecturers makes it

difficult for universities to offer the extra places.

In **Kuala Lumpur**, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said that the Government would study the possibility of increasing the wages of medical lecturers to attract more professionals, although he admitted that doctors could make more money in private practice than by lecturing.

"It would be a big sacrifice for them to give up their practice and lecture," he said.

He also asked the 128 top scorers to give the Higher Education Ministry time to study their appeals. "I believe

the ministry is sensitive to their plight, but the capacity to increase the places in medical faculties depends on various factors. We must ensure that our standard of education is maintained."

Meanwhile, Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek hoped the matter would not be turned into a racial issue. "It will be discussed at the Cabinet meeting."

A total of 38,892 places were available in public universities for this year's academic session, scheduled to begin on June 13.

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