

MALAYSIA

Royal award-winning scholar decries using ‘social contract’ to justify university quotas, says practice discriminatory



M. Nahvin, a recent recipient of the Royal Education Award, has reportedly slammed the government for instituting Bumiputera quotas for university spots, saying such a practice is ethnically discriminatory. — Screengrab from YouTube

By **Anis Zalani**

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 — M. Nahvin, a recent recipient of the Royal Education Award, has reportedly slammed the government for instituting Bumiputera quotas for university spots, saying such a practice is ethnically discriminatory.

Directing his barbs at Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who recently justified the practice by citing the so-called “social contract”, Nahvin reportedly highlighted how the agreement that is seen as unjust does not actually exist.

“The people that have the talent, passion, capability, they cannot get in [to university],” he told *Free Malaysia Today*.

He added that he believes many students who obtained university places because of the quota system had not made the most of their opportunities.

“What I am calling for is fairness in education. Whoever gets 10As with good co-curricular records should get to attend matriculation or study the foundation course of their choice,” he reportedly said.

Nahvin pointed to a recent remark by Anwar [in July](#), where he suggested that Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek should maintain the Bumiputera quotas in public universities while opening up more spaces for high-achievers from other communities.

Anwar emphasised that quotas were meant to help Bumiputera students become competitive as they had previously been few in the engineering and medical faculties of public universities back in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, he said that the weakness of such a system is that it weakens meritocracy.

In response, Nahvin said he found that Anwar’s reply was unfair and had coloured his perception as a Pakatan Harapan supporter.

“The ‘social contract’ is not justice. It is racial discrimination. It is upsetting,” he was quoted as saying.

He said the government should instead lead the discussions on the quota system rather than censuring those who oppose it, believing that the absence of meritocracy is the primary cause behind the decline of the education system.

Nahvin also said he would not discount the possibility of him emigrating if there is no improvement in the ethnic situation within the country.

The “social contract”, an unwritten deal said to be agreed upon before the nation’s Independence in 1957, has always been the point of contention, particularly over the special rights accorded to the Malays, the country’s most dominant ethnic group.

It is not expressly mentioned in the Constitution, but is purportedly a quid pro quo trade-off with its indigenous Bumiputera communities for granting citizenship to the immigrant Chinese and Indians and has been repeatedly touted to defend the special rights of the Malays.

Nahvin graduated with a bachelor’s degree in computer science (artificial intelligence) from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) and was awarded the prestigious Royal Education Award earlier this month.

In his acceptance speech, he challenged the status quo by calling for meritocracy in education and the protection of minority rights — citing a close friend who was denied admission into a matriculation programme despite possessing similar qualifications as him.