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Review of Universities Act `not political gimmick'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The proposed review of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1974 by the Barisan Nasional Youth is not a political gimmick.

Its acting chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said today it was merely to gather information and facts from university students and to understand their grouses.

"It (review of the Act) is a realisation on our part that we represent the younger leadership and they are going to determine whether the movement is relevant and effective in the future.

"Youths' voices must be heard, if not our leadership will be at risk. The end result of this on-going review is the survival of the party," Hishammuddin said after chairing the BN Youth meeting.

Asked if the review was a political gimmick in expectation of the coming general election, he said even the visit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to China was said to be a gimmick.

"Even sending students to study medicine in Ireland was said to be a political gimmick. If it really was a gimmick, we would have sent them for a six-month diploma, not a six-year degree programme."

The review, conducted in the form of dialogues with students, would be ready in two months. It is being carried out with the co-operation of other BN Youth components and includes the Education Ministry.

The proposal to review the Act was first made by Gerakan Youth during its national delegates conference on Aug 7.

"At an early stage of the survey, students had raised the issue of the Act's provisions such as sections 15 and 16 and asked if it prohibited their development.

"They also brought up issues on the university's administration and management, the delay in receiving funds from their scholarships and the slowness in scholarship approval."

Section 15 of the Act stipulates that students can get involved in political associations and organisations with the permission of the university's deputy vice-chancellor.

"Based on what we have so far, it seems that many students do not really look at the Act in detail and the effect of its provisions.

"For example, many students were concerned about their welfare but this is not covered under the Act. Our task is to collect information and see if we can overcome the problems without amending the Act.

"There are many clauses in the Act that were not questioned.

"I need facts and information that can really be used," Hishammuddin said, adding that a secretariat had been set up to allow better interaction with students at Umno headquarters.

On the People's Progressive Party's suggestion that the quota of non-Bumiputera university students be increased, he said the proposal would not be accepted.

"The issue is not increasing the quota of non-Bumiputeras but how we can expand the present system to accommodate everybody..."

"We have our own position and we will not accept the proposal," Hishammuddin said.

He also announced that the BN Youth Convention would be held on Sept 15 to 19 in Sabah. Party president Dr Mahathir and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi are expected to attend.

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