

17/07/2001

Draw up new regulations instead of amending Act, say former student leaders

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Former student leaders today said formulating new laws to stop political parties from influencing undergraduates was the best way of keeping students from engaging in negative activities.

This, they said, was a more viable method compared to amending the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971.

They expressed concern that a review of the Act might serve to curtail the students' freedom of expression.

International Islamic University lecturer Dennis Pestana, in calling for more details of the proposed amendments to be released, said there was no necessity to amend the Act.

Pestana, a former Universiti Malaya student leader, is concerned that a review of the Act might cause students to go "underground" and as a result, bring about even more mischief.

"Besides, the number of outspoken students are small ... they represent only the minority. They should be allowed to air their views through the proper channels."

He said it was important too that students be given freedom to express themselves, as only then would they develop analytical skills.

"As it is, undergraduates now are already being spoonfed. How can we develop students of calibre if they are not allowed to do anything?"

Former student leader and UM undergraduate Stephen Doss said the University and University Colleges Act was already very comprehensive, and as such there was no need to amend it.

Doss, who now heads the Persatuan Pemuda Negara Malaysia, said new laws should instead be formulated to prevent political parties from influencing undergraduates.

"Legislation should be imposed on the political parties out to cause trouble, not the students."

Doss said, however, that while the Act was comprehensive, monitoring by university authorities needed to be strengthened.

"The university authorities did not have many problems with students in the early 90s. Therefore, the monitoring of their activities became rather lax.

"Now that students are becoming more outspoken, the university administration is unsure how to bring them back in line."

Yesterday, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin had said the Education Ministry would prepare a paper on amendments to the Act and would expedite the process if there was an urgent need for such a move.

He was commenting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Saturday that the Act might be reviewed to deter students from engaging in negative activities.

(END)