

10/09/2003

Ministry should act immediately against politically active students

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EDUCATION Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad's statement that the results of the recent campus elections in local universities show that the students are immature is shocking.

It is so because the statement comes from the same person who is responsible for ensuring the quality of education in the country.

Isn't it the responsibility of the Ministry which Musa heads to ensure that only mature, high-quality students are admitted to the universities?

Musa's remarks give the impression that there are serious weaknesses in the education system of which he is custodian.

Why is it that only when students in some of the universities vote pro-Opposition candidates in their respective campuses, that they are immature?

These students made it to the universities through a system which the Ministry created. If these students are immature, surely there must be something wrong with the system.

The Minister said the recent campus elections were more politically-inclined. He said the student leaders were not elected based on issues such as the welfare of students as is the case in foreign universities.

Surely, the Minister realises that student welfare is not an issue in Malaysian universities. Almost every university student gets either a scholarship or loan from the Government.

What they lack is the sense of gratitude. These students expect the Government not only to provide them places at local universities, but also scholarships, grants and loans to fund their education.

But instead of repaying the Government by concentrating on their studies and passing with distinctions, some instead turned against the Government.

Influenced by those opposing the establishment, they shifted their focus and became more active in politics.

Now more interested in organising or taking part in demonstrations and rallies, they further neglected their studies.

Students who receive scholarships and grants from the Government have no business taking part in political activities until they have graduated.

This is because the large amount of public funds allocated to provide education to students will be wasted if they spend their time and energy on activities that have nothing to do with their studies.

The universities should constantly monitor the performance of these students. If they do below par in their first or second year simply because they are only interested in non-academic related activities, these students should immediately be removed to save public funds.

There is no point in financing their entire course only to learn at the end of the day that they cannot make the grade for a degree, or have qualified only for a general degree - unacceptable in this case because everything has been provided for.

When the post of Education Minister was given to Musa, a career academician, in a Cabinet reshuffle which followed the 1999 general election, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad explained that the move was to depoliticise the Ministry.

This is a unique departure from the Barisan Nasional's tradition.

Normally, only senior members of the Cabinet are given the task of heading the Education Ministry, one of the more important portfolios.

The fact that an academician who has no experience in politics was made

Education Minister goes to show the importance that the Prime Minister has placed on education. It is to ensure that education remains free from political influences which may poison the minds of the young, who are inheritors of the country's future.

But what is happening at universities these days raises the question of whether the ministry has been successful.

Opposition parties continue to penetrate campuses in mysterious ways, although political activities at universities contravene the Universities and University Colleges Act.

A number of lecturers and students openly support the opposition. The ministry must admit this and act accordingly, not simply because the students and lecturers are supporting the opposition but because their activities are blatantly illegal.

Why the ministry and the universities are slow in taking action against these students and lecturers, is mind-boggling.