

Dropping varsity law too hot a question for Najib
Malaysiakini.com
June 27, 2011

Prime Minister Najib Razak was non-committal tonight when asked if he would amend or repeal the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UUCA), which has been highly criticised for curtailing the political freedom of university students.

To a question during a dialogue with young professionals in Kuala Lumpur this evening, Najib said he was "open about it" but stayed ambivalent on his administration's commitment to granting mature students political freedom.

"I'm still open about it. But I would like to ensure there is stability in the campuses. If it is too open, then students will be involved in intra-party politics. But I do want to encourage students to decide for themselves.

"And we can encourage more activities in the campuses so that students will have an open mind and relate to what is happening in the country," said Najib in a curt reply.

He was speaking to several hundred participants at "An Evening with the Prime Minister", organised by the Young Corporate Malaysians (YCM) at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

The person who posed the question was Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) student Woon King Chai, who has been charged with violating provisions under the UUCA.

Woon was among four political science students who were nabbed by the police for allegedly campaigning for the opposition during the 2009 Hulu Selangor by-election.

Although police freed them, the four were hauled up by UKM's disciplinary committee and asked to show cause. They filed a court injunction against UKM's disciplinary proceedings, but this was rejected and the matter is now pending appeal.

Their predicament earned them much media attention, even from the New York Times, which published a report on the issue in December last year.

Woon had asked the premier about his thoughts on amending the UUCA, and went on to remind Najib that he had said in April 2009, shortly after taking office as prime minister, that the era of "government knows best" was over.

"What are your views on allowing students to have the responsibility to choose and decide for themselves?" asked Woon, triggering hoots of approval and applause from the floor.

YCM was established in January 2008 by a group of young professionals with the objective of building a network of young professionals through various informative and social events beneficial to members.