

**Deputy minister: 3 other laws need amending**  
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**by Hafiz Yatim**

The repeal of Section 15 of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UUCA) should also include amendments to three other laws to allow students at institutions of higher learning to participate in politics, said Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah.

He said this is to make the purpose of repealing Section 15 more relevant, and encompassing other laws governing institutions of higher learning, including polytechnics, private institutions, and community colleges.

The three Acts which he referred to are the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996, Educational Institutions (Discipline) Act 1976 and also Universiti Teknologi Mara Act 1976.

"The principle announced by the prime minister in announcing the repeal of Section 15 of UUCA is radical as the government has now announced university students now have the right to participate in politics, which they didn't have before.

"The amendment should possess progressive and not regressive characteristics. It should be comprehensive and not restrictive. We want the amendments to see a lot of do's and not don'ts.

"We have to enforce the principle of allowing students at institutions of higher learning to participate in politics," Saifuddin told Malaysiakini, in an exclusive interview.

If not, Saifuddin said, it would not put much meaning to the government's ongoing efforts of transformation.

He said the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act involves Section 47, while the Educational Institutions (Discipline) Act involves Section 10, while the UITM Act, relates to Educational Institutions.

These sections, Saifuddin said, are quite similar to Section 15 of the UUCA and that if the amendments do not cover the other provisions in other Acts, such move would be seen as regressive.

On Thursday, Premier Najib Abdul Razak (left), while withdrawing three Emergency Proclamations, had also announced the government's decision to repeal Section 15 of UUCA. However, it had also decided to appeal the Court of Appeal's landmark decision.

The government had been under tremendous pressure since the appellate court had on Oct 31 ruled Section 15 (5) (a) that bars students from taking part in politics, as unconstitutional.

"From the start I have stated that we should not appeal. Several ministers, vice-chancellors, as well as a group of BN backbenchers also feel the same way. However, I understand the appeal is a formality and on a certain point of law."

"Regardless whether the government is going to win the court appeal or not, the onus is still on us (the government) to make the opportunity to be more progressive and comprehensive and avoid being regressive and restrictive," he said.

Saifuddin said what was important was that while the government may allow university students to participate in politics, what was important was that they do not bring politics into the campus.

Big picture

Asked on the contradictions as pointed in the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011, where those below 21 cannot

organise demonstrations, the deputy minister asked to look at the big picture.

"There is a drastic change as previously the government was allergic to assemblies. In the past, when we want to assemble, the government may say no. But now at least the government allows assembly as part of democracy," he said.

Saifuddin said he understood there are questions which have arisen from the Bill as BN backbenchers have also discussed it among themselves.

"I do not know what will happen on Tuesday. I hope there is time to do the amendments to improve the Bill. As a whole, the Bill's introduction is a transformation on the government's view towards assembly. But there are a few things in it which I hope can be improved.

"I also know that several BN MPs want amendments to the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011. They have a legal background and I agree with their views. It should not be as restrictive as the UUCA," he said.

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