

UUCA 'opens minds', says pro-gov't student group
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Contrary to popular belief, the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) in its present form, after the 2009 amendments, is the main vehicle for students to attain academic freedom, contends pro-government student group Aspirasi.

NONE"UUCA frees the mind of students from inappropriate thinking," its chief Mohd Shahar Abdullah (left) told the audience at a forum in Shah Alam yesterday.

Speaking as a panel member at the 'UUCA, is it still relevant?' forum organised by Malay-language daily Sinar Harian, Shahar argued that such safeguards would ensure that the "factories" that universities continued to produce "quality" graduates.

"The law protects the rights of the majority of the students, for whom academic achievement is the main objective," he said.

Shahar believes that confining the campus to just student politics is the bar that must be set to make sure students are not confused in the head.

'National agendas confise students'

"National agendas should not be the focus of students in campus. If you mix in national agenda, then the students may get confused," he argued.

However, in a 180-degree turn from his no-national-agenda-for-students stance, Shahar is adamant that Aspirasi has the right to break UUCA provisions in its protests demanding the resignation of Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah.

"We expected such questions, but we dare to come and dare to answer. He did not dare to come down... how far is Seremban from Putrajaya? I am sure his Perdana can make it. Even my old car can... we are thinking of the welfare of students, which is part of our charter."

He also defended similar "reactions" to the flag lowering incident at PWTC which saw a student leader lowering a flag bearing the likeness of Umno president Najib Abdul Razak as a means of defending national interests.

"We cannot be afraid to speak up or react. If we don't react, then some will think that Malaysia can (easily) fall... We are surrounded by overseas adversaries who want to take away the Malacca Straits!" Shahar said.

Shahar also expressed Aspirasi's full support for Najib, despite not agreeing with the prime minister's decision to amend the UUCA, which he contended "is perfect as it is".

Malaysian Youth Council (MYC) president Mohamad Maliki Mohamad Rapiee agreed with Shahar that the UUCA was still relevant.

However, Maliki called for the Act to be amended to allow for full political participation of students to avoid the triple standards that allow overseas and non-university youths to be political, but not local university students.

He believes that UUCA is needed to ensure that there is a "framework to control" and "manage conflicts" among the youth.

NONEFor suspended Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) student Adam Adli (left), the one who lowered the Najib flag at PWTC, neither UUCA, political parties nor government control are the answer to student independence and academic freedom.

"Only students can bring about true academic independence... No political party is actually fighting for student rights. This is because student freedom will undermine both the government and the opposition," Adam said.

"No university should be under the influence of anyone," he said. And for this, the UUCA should be done away with and a Magna Carta of student rights - which Adam said the students have drafted and is akin to a Bill of Academic Rights - should be adopted.

"It is not oppressive law, but a law to inculcate values," he explained.

Adam also defended the student's use of opposition platforms to air their message as a necessary means to further their struggle for now.

"We use the Pakatan platform because there no other platform is open to us. We can organise, but are allowed only one event a month... and even then, we lack the money to organise," reasoned Adam.

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