

Decision on language club ban 'soon'
Malaysiakini.com
March 16, 2007
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The results of a review to lift the ban on Chinese language societies in public universities will be revealed soon, a Higher Education Ministry official said.

Ahmad Ikmal Ismail, special officer to Higher Education Minister Mustapa Mohamed, told student activists today that a government-appointed review committee is in the "final stages" of making its decision.

"I cannot guarantee when, but I promise it will be soon," Amar told over a dozen students during a dialogue at the ministry in Putrajaya today.

Deemed by the government to discourage unity among the races, Chinese language societies have been effectively banned from universities for over three decades.

However, proponents have claimed that the authorities merely wanted to nullify hotbeds of opposition politics.

Currently, only Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Malaya (UM) have language societies. They were formed prior to the introduction of the University and University College Act (UUCA) in 1974, an act which stemmed political activity.

No public hearing

Ahmad, accompanied by two ministry officers, told students from Inter-Varsity Council (IVC), Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM) and Gabungan Anak Muda dan Pelajar (GAMP) that the review will include feedback from academicians and university staff.

Students presented a memorandum demanding the right to associate, to allow unregistered societies to be registered and to abolish the UUCA.

Ahmad shot down a proposal by the students to turn the review proceedings into a public hearing. Another proposal to publicise the review's progress in the ministry's website was also turned down.

During the hour-long dialogue, students lamented little result have been forthcoming since the issue was raised late last year.

Last November, over 20 students presented a memorandum to revive the Chinese Language Society at the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), which was banned 25 years ago, but has been operating illegally ever since. Ministry officials had promised to look into the matter.

"We have been promised results, but there has been delay after delay. What's to prevent the ministry from delaying further," said one student.

Still the same answer

Ahmad later said that the ministry welcomes feedback and is receptive to seeing the students again.

"But please don't describe us as tyrants, as in your memorandum. We spend nights poring over things like your request (to overturn the ban). If we were out to oppress people, we wouldn't be meeting you," said one ministry official.

Later, IVC president Wong Weng Woo expressed disappointment at the dialogue. "They (Ministry officials) can't give us a deadline. They just said it is being finalised, but that's not concrete. They can't give an exact date. They're still the same," he told reporters after the meeting.

"The government does not want to allow students to be involved in the policy making process. The government is still thinking that students are children and they are the parents. This is not right," he said.

He added that the student committees give two months before "we stop crossing our fingers."

In 1972, a crackdown on student activism dubbed Operasi Mayang resulted in many student groups being deregistered, including UPM's Chinese Language Society.

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