

Dr M: Varsities Act put in place to protect students

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SINTOK: The Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 was implemented to protect students from being exploited by politicians, and not to restrict their freedom, said former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir, who was instrumental in implementing the Act when he was Education Minister, said politicians had in the past exploited students for their own selfish interests.

“Students are easily influenced. We do not want them to be distracted by people with vested interest.

“That particular year (in 1971), university students held demonstrations to protest a non-issue. They made baseless claims that the Government had let a child in Baling die of starvation.

“We found that the demonstrations were politically motivated,” he said, adding that an ambitious politician who wanted to become prime minister was the mastermind behind the instigation.

He said this when a Universiti Utara Malaysia student asked for his opinion on calls to have the Act abolished or reviewed.

Dr Mahathir, who earlier presented a lecture on “Graduate Leadership: Roles, Challenges and Direction,” said students who held the protests in 1971 had in fact made a mockery of the kampung culture.

“In Malaysian kampung, people do not die of starvation. There is always food. People do not let their neighbours starve,” he said.

If students were concerned about children dying of hunger, they should repay their study loans to help the Government help such children, he said.

Students must find ways of contributing back to the society because 90% of their tuition fees at universities come from the public, he added.

He said if students feel that the Act was obsolete, they could always ask the leadership to review it, adding that laws could always be changed.

“Luckily I am no longer the prime minister,” he quipped.

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