

**UUCA amendment just 'window-dressing', says Pakatan
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By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 24 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers poured cold water today over Putrajaya's plans to lift the ban on students in politics, saying it was a window-dressing move aimed to woo young voters.

Several MPs pointed out that the unexpected announcement made by Datuk Seri Najib Razak in Parliament this morning had come with several disclaimers — that students must be aged above 21 to become political party members; that politics would remain prohibited from campuses; and that the government would still appeal a recent court ruling declaring the ban unconstitutional.

"The bottom line is — nothing has changed," said DAP's Segambut MP Lim Lip Eng.

"On the one hand, you said you will amend the law, on the other, you say you will appeal the decision. On the one hand, you say they can become political party members, on the other, you say politics are not allowed in campus.

"Only one word to describe this — oxymoron," he told The Malaysian Insider.

PAS's Kuala Selangor MP Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (picture) agreed, and accused Najib of attempting to woo young voters with the "window-dressing" move.

"Only one thing is for certain...they are doing this for the sole reason of winning over young voters. To me, there is no two-ways about it — they should just completely abolish the law," he said.

When tabling a motion to lift three Emergency declarations this morning, Najib said the government would soon amend Section 15 of the University and University Colleges Act (UUCA) to allow students aged above 21 to become members of political parties.

He stressed however that the government would still appeal the recent court ruling declaring the section unconstitutional and that politics in campuses would still be strictly prohibited.

In a majority 2-1 judgement earlier this month, a three-man panel of judges ruled that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) had breached Article 10 of the country's highest law when it disciplined four students involved in a political campaign last year under Section 15(5)(5)(a) of the UUCA.

"This is what I call a great confusion. With elections looming so close, Najib and his team are trying out this window-dressing move, pulling wool over the people's eye to hoodwink them into thinking the government is their saviour," said Dzulkefly.

He added that universities presently have their own respective by-laws and constitutions, which he said was enough to govern its operations, including student movement.

PAS's Pokok Sena MP Datuk Mahfuz Omar said the government's decision to appeal the decision would contradict its plan to amend Section 15 of the law.

He said Putrajaya should not proceed with the appeal to prove its sincerity in amending the law, adding that Najib, in his speech this morning, had not detailed if the proposed amendments would grant students total freedom to participate in politics, including holding positions in political parties.

"What is important to me is that students and academicians be given full opportunities to discuss openly ideas and matters of national importance both inside and outside the campus... it is not just about allowing them to join political parties," he said. Dr Dzulkefly said the government needed to allow greater freedom to students and academicians in order to breed more intellectuals in society.

"We want alert-minded intellectuals, enterprising graduates, morally upright, intellectually superior... you cannot have that in an environment that breeds bigotry. Bigots are not intellectuals," he said.

PKR's Subang MP R. Sivarasa concurred and pointed out to the declining state of Malaysian universities, saying local institutions do not provide an "atmosphere of open, critical thinkers".

He also accused the government of practising double standards, saying that while politics was banned in local campuses, Umno has student clubs formed in foreign institutions.

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