

Right to free speech
The Malay Mail
September 20, 2011
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PETALING JAYA: It is high time the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU) 1971 be reviewed to allow students to be involved in politics as they have a right to freedom of speech and expression under the Federal Constitution, say analysts.

However, university authorities and student bodies are divided over the repeal of Section 15 of AUKU which prohibits students from joining political parties.

Political analyst Khoo Kay Peng said doing away with Section 15 was long overdue.

"It is time to free up the university to allow better quality debates at campuses. Such a move also respected citizens' constitutional rights, especially those aged 21 and above, who are allowed to vote."

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) student representative council (SRC) president Mohammad Iqbal Abdul Wahab said students should be allowed greater participation in the democratic process.

"Such an amendment to AUKU would help students become more mature in thought and action," he said.

"If we want Malaysia move up the university rankings then we must have students able to think critically."

However, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) political scientist Prof Dr Shamsul Adabi Mamat felt increasing freedom for students would only serve to increase politicking at campuses.

"Not having Section 15 would give rise to students becoming more critical of the university administration and this could cause more problems," he said.

"Instead of leading to the maturity of students, the opposite could happen. Also, not all students are interested in politics."

Universiti Sains Malaysia's (USM) SRC president Mohammad Izwan Jamaludin was concerned any amendment to AUKU would only provide political parties direct access to campus students.

"Section 15 sets perimeters for proper student conduct which ensures clear separation of academia and politics," he said.

"Dropping that will result in the university's academia becoming politicised too."

Monash University Malaysia political scientist Dr James Chin said whether or not AUKU was reviewed or abolished, would have no effect whatsoever.

"Many university students are already members of organisations with political affiliations and many are even members of political parties," he said.

"In campuses, they don't call it political activities but leadership camp, so there will be no effect, except political activities will be done openly. The only difference is students who write anonymously on the Internet will be able to reveal their identities."

Checks by *The Malay Mail* with various political parties found it easy for those aged 18 and above to join the parties.

"AUKU? No problem. University students and others can join so long as you are over 18, so don't worry," said a party membership registrar.

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