

University autonomy 'meaningless' if UUCA not scrapped, says PKR leader
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 27 — A PKR leader told Putrajaya today that it is “meaningless” to grant autonomy to local universities if the controversial Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) is still in force.

“Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin announced yesterday that five public universities... are to enjoy autonomy. This move however is meaningless as the draconian UUCA is still in force,” PKR communications director Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad (picture) said today.

In his announcement yesterday, Khaled said autonomy would be granted to four more universities — Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia.

The four institutions would now join the ranks of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, which was the first local university to be granted autonomy in its administration.

Nik Nazmi reiterated the opposition’s stand that the UUCA was draconian and should be repealed, saying that it has been a “major hurdle” to university autonomy and academic freedom.

“The government’s decision to amend section 15 of the UUCA is a lame concession as it does nothing to address the culture of fear and centralisation of power that the UUCA has engendered.

“Students, the civil society and the opposition have been consistently arguing this for decades but it took the UKM 4 landmark decision for the government to finally acknowledge this fact,” he said.

Section 15 of the UUCA is set to be amended during the March parliamentary sitting to allow students to be politically active.

Nik Nazmi also expressed his party’s regret at Kolej Universiti Insaniah Kedah’s (KUIN) decision to use the UUCA on five of its students, despite Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) rallying call for the law to be abolished.

“We hope that justice will prevail in this case and that all Pakatan states will show their commitment against the UUCA by not allowing a repeat of such incidents. We have fought for too long and too hard to allow such abuses of fundamental rights to continue,” he said.

The “Kuin Five” were hauled up before a disciplinary committee on May 25, 2011 for breaching the UUCA by participating in a demonstration, making speeches with loudspeakers and holding a press conference to protest the use of a religious teaching block to house a smart school.

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