

Reforms to allow undergrads in politics tabled in Dewan Rakyat
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 — Putrajaya today tabled amendments to several laws aimed at allowing university students to become members of political parties, fulfilling Datuk Seri Najib Razak's pledge last year to increase civil freedom.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Khaled Noordin (picture) tabled three Bills for first reading in the Dewan Rakyat, proposing to amend three laws — the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UUCA), Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 (PHEIA) and Education Institutions Act (EIA) (Discipline) Act 1976.

Section 15 of the principal UUCA will be amended to include "activities of students' society, organisation, body or group", which allow students to become members of any society, organisation, body or group of persons, whether in or outside Malaysia, including any political party.

However, the amendments also state, under Section 15(2), that the student shall not "become a member of any unlawful society, organisation, body or group of persons, whether in or outside Malaysia".

The section also prohibits students from participating in any election or hold posts in "any society, organisation, body or group of students in the campus if the student holds any post in a political party".

They are also prohibited from participating in any political party activities within the campus, under Section 15(2)(d).

The same provisions have also been included via the substitution of Section 47 of the PHEIA and Section 10 of the EIA.

Speaking at a press conference in Parliament later, Khaled said that the amendments stipulate that the students can be members of political parties but cannot contest during campus elections or hold posts in student societies and organisations.

"Those elected to a political party post should know not to offer themselves for positions within the campus. But they can be members.

"This is to maintain neutrality of the campus. We do not want students propagating their party views in campus," he said.

Khaled also announced that a Students' Complaints Committee, to be headed by a vice-chancellor, would be formed to listen to grouses.

"Students are often faced with so many problems but there is no platform for them to take their woes to.

"This is so that there is a medium for them to lodge their complaints," he said.

Another amendment to the UUCA includes the appointment of a Higher Education director-general who "shall keep and maintain" a "National Higher Education Register", which contains the particulars of higher educational institutions, programmes provided for by higher educational institutions and others.

Najib had promised last year to implement reforms to give Malaysians more freedom including repealing the Internal Security Act (ISA), also expected during the current sitting, as well as the enactment of the Peaceful Assembly Act last year and the formation of a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral improvements, whose findings were adopted by the Dewan Rakyat last week without debate.

But Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has criticised the prime minister, saying the latter was only serious about reforms "to gain a feel-good factor among urban voters."

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