

BN, PR MPs agree to more student freedom in politics
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 — Malaysian parliamentarians shed their political differences tonight to unanimously vote on legislative amendments granting university students freedom to hold posts in both political parties and on-campus organisations.

The Dewan Rakyat approved the amendments via voice vote after Khairy Jamaluddin (BN-Rembau) moved three motions under Standing Orders 57(2) to scrap sub-clauses Section 15(2)(c) in the University and University Colleges (Amendment) Bill 2012, Section 10(2)(c) in the Educational Institutions (Discipline) (Amendment) Bill 2012 and Section 47(2)(c) in the Private Higher Educational Institutions (Amendment) Bill 2012 (PHEIA) that were tabled in the House last week.

The Umno Youth chief pushed to remove all three provisions, which state that a university student "shall not stand for election or hold any post in any society, organisation, body or group of students in the campus if the student holds any post in a political party".

Addressing the House, Khairy (picture) commended the amendments to the highly-criticised laws but said the sub-clauses contradict the government's intention to allow student participation in politics.

"The purpose of the prohibition in the subsection is to maintain campus neutrality. Although we agree that campus neutrality is needed to ensure that politics does not interfere with academic pursuit, but we should not go to the extent of imposing regressive restrictions to the freedom given.

"To us, this restriction gives the view that the government's transformation is merely half-baked and it would create more negative polemic although the original amendment was meant to grant greater freedom to the students," he said.

Khairy added that barring a student who holds a political party post from holding another position in an on-campus organisation ultimately labels the student as being part of a group imposing negative influence on others.

The young politician said the provision would also hamper the country's efforts in seeking future political leaders, adding that the university campus is the best training ground for to harness their abilities.

"At the same time, as the BN Youth and Umno Youth chief, as well as a youth leader, I fully support the efforts of transformation meant by this amendment.

"This is because it celebrates the idealisms of the young, boosts the roles of our students, speeds up the democratic process and practices and encourage public participation in the police making process," he said.

MPs from both Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) voted in support of the amendment.

But the parliamentarians later differed on their views when Tony Pua (DAP-Petaling Jaya Utara) mooted more amendments to the UUCA, also under Standing Orders 57(2), to several other sub-clauses in the University and University Colleges (Amendment) Bill 2012.

Among others, the DAP lawmaker had sought amendments to Section 15(3) of the Bill, which he said effectively prohibits a student from commenting on the outcome of a court case that finds an accused guilty of a particular crime.

Pua said that law students, in particular, should have the right to discuss if a court had erred in its decision.

Another clause that Pua said requires further amendments are Section 4(a) and (b) of the proposed Bill.

Section 4(a), he pointed out, may allow a student to speak on matters concerning the discipline he or she is in but effectively prohibits the student from speaking on other matters outside his or her study subject.

Section 4 (b), he said, grants the university board full authority to decide where a student can speak, even if the organisers are legal under law, so long as it feels it is detrimental to university regulations.

But his proposed amendments were rejected via voice vote.

The three amendment Bills were later approved by the lower House.

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