

**Albukhary University To Shut Over Student Dissatisfaction, Management Issues**  
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**By Looi Sue-Chern**

Malaysian tycoon Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Albukhary's full-scholarship university in Kedah is being shut down this weekend because of student dissatisfaction with the programmes and management issues – with undergraduates being pushed elsewhere next week.

An official of the Albukhary International University (AiU) in Alor Star, Kedah, told The Malaysian Insider that the first batch of its 600 students are set to pack up and transfer to another university tomorrow.

"At the early stage, we were advised to restructure but we have now been advised by the (education) ministry to close.

"It may be a temporary closure or a permanent one. If we are told to revamp and start afresh, then that is what we will do. But we are still waiting for further instruction from the ministry," she told The Malaysian Insider.

AiU – a fully residential campus with comprehensive facilities in an 18ha site near the city of Alor Star – was set up in 2010 as a “waqf” (eternally charitable) institution funded by Syed Mokhtar's Albukhary Foundation.

The international university has a diverse enrolment from more than 50 countries, with about 75% of them foreigners. Every AiU student holds a scholarship from the foundation.

The university offered foundation studies and degrees in Banking and Finance, Business Administration, Information Technology and Computer Science.

The programmes are approved by the ministry and granted at least the Malaysian Quality Agency (MQA) Provisional Accreditation.

Staff and students at the university have endured uncertainty over the past few months with speculation that the university was going to cease operations because of money problems and would be sold.

It was reported in February this year that the academic staff had been informed that the campus may be closed and they should start looking for new jobs.

The university has also stopped taking in new students, with the admission page on its website “closed for maintenance”. Students were also informed that they would be transferred to other private and public institutions.

On speculation that the university faced financial difficulties, was almost bankrupt and would be sold, the spokesperson denied that they were the cause of the university's possible closure.

"We do not have financial issues," she said, adding that the foundation now has to cough up more to transfer the students and pay higher tuition fees for them in other universities and colleges.

She said the present focus of the university was the interest of its students.

She said the students had complained about the programmes and the founder of the university (Syed Mokhtar) wanted the students to graduate with good degrees that would help them to secure employment.

"The students were unhappy but this is not the main reason we are transferring them or closing the university.

"We just hope they will graduate from a university with good standards," she said.

On the argument by some students that they should be allowed to finish their studies at AiU before the institution closed down, she said it would not be to the students' benefit to hold degrees from a university that was no longer operational.

"It's not like we are trying to wash our hands of our responsibility to the students. We are doing our best to help them.

"Even the administration and academic staff will lose their jobs when the university closes.

"There is always a risk like losing one's job at a private institution. For our teaching staff, we are helping them send out their resumes," she said.

On accusations that the students were being forced to sign a new agreement for their scholarships, the spokesperson said certain amendments were made to encourage the students to do better in their studies.

"There is a clause that requires the students to improve their performance every semester. By their final semester, they must finish with a minimum 2.5 grade point average.

"The old agreement only stated that they have to keep above 2.0... we do not want the scholarships to be abused.

"They will still receive the scholarship. We want the students to study and graduate with good grades. Some 60% of our students are doing well. They have good communication skills," she said.

A professor at the university described the situation as a "mess" and said that it was causing much uncertainty among students.

"There has been nothing in black and white to explain what is happening and why. No reason was ever given," he said. The academic, who spoke to The Malaysian Insider on condition of anonymity, said the Private Higher Education Institutions Act stated that students must be given one calendar year to prepare if they were to be transferred because their university was closing down.

"Here they are being given two or three months. They are worried. They don't know what to do.

"Now they are transferring credits indiscriminately and they may have to extend their studies.

"Also, they are told to sign new agreements for their scholarships. These students do not understand legal language and now there is a clause that says they have to repay the scholarship if they breach certain conditions.

"Isn't this a charitable education institution? The students are from poor backgrounds and they came here hoping to get their degrees," he said.

A student who declined to be named said that 90% of the students have been under tremendous stress since being told that they would have to change universities.

He said many students felt unsure about the new agreements but some 230 of them had the new deal on Thursday afternoon.

They would be the first batch to move tomorrow (Sunday) to the Asia Pacific University in Kuala Lumpur, he said.

"We are not sure which other universities the rest of us will go to but if given the choice, I don't want to move."

He said there has been much dissatisfaction among the students since they learned of the university's possible closure three months ago.

"They also tell us that our old scholarship agreements are null and void and we need to sign new agreements.

"The new agreements were printed in difficult language on papers without letterheads or logos, and students are told that the foundation can change the deal and seek repayment.

"We are totally at their mercy," he said.

According to the student, each receives RM66,000 from the foundation for their studies, allowances and funds to buy necessary items and equipment like computers and books.

Meanwhile, Pokok Sena MP Datuk Mahfuz Omar, who had raised the issue in Parliament recently, said it was important to know what is happening.

"Nobody knows clearly what is going on. I asked about it in the Dewan Rakyat but I got no answers.

"It is important to know because it is a charity outfit that benefits poor students and involving a well-known foundation that carries the name Albukhary," he said.

The Albukhary Foundation was established in 1996 on the principles of taqwa (piety) and ehsan (compassion).

It gained recognition locally and abroad for aiding Muslims and other neglected communities affected by poverty, war and natural calamities, as well as for promoting Islamic heritage, culture and scholarship among Muslims and non-Muslims. – April 12, 2014.

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