Amendments to UUCA will allow them to take part in politics, but not on the campus

By IKRAM ISMAIL

The freedom for students to take part in politics — a policy that university students have been campaigning for — has finally materialised, but at a cost.

The tabling of the Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Bill, Private Higher Educational Institutions (Amendment) Bill and the Educational Institutions (Discipline) (Amendment) Bill yesterday, while generally lauded, has now brought the students a new dilemma.

While the amendments enable them to join political parties, it bars them from engaging in political activities on campus to maintain neutrality at the universities.

They are also not allowed to contest in campus elections or hold any posts in university organisations if they are part of a political party.

The “double-edged sword” has not gone down well with student groups, who believe they are mature enough to handle both tasks evenly and still juggle their studies.

Peninsular Malay Students Coalition (GPMS) president Jais Abdul Karim, while praising the government for tabling the much-awaited Bill, disagreed with the restrictions.

“The same students involved in politics outside should be allowed to hold student leadership posts on campus. It takes a different breed of student who is brave enough to engage in such matters. “In politics, one has to develop charisma, people skills and leadership qualities. These qualities can be brought to use on the academic front and be used to engage other students, not to mention the wealth of experience garnered from being involved in politics outside,” he said.

National Student Representative Council (MPMN) president Mohd Syahid Mohd Zaini, dismissed the restrictions as “unnecessary” and a step backwards.

“As long as the students behave professionally, they can balance all the tasks out and still maintain their grades. It would be perfectly acceptable for any student holding a high position in campus to bring his or her own political ideology in, provided they respect the university’s laws and regulations,” he said.

He said MPMN rejects the amendments in the UUCA and wants the Act abolished altogether.

“There are simply too many regulations. This will put pressure on the students,” said the former Universiti Malaya student council president.

Malaysian National Muslim Student Association (PKIM) president Ahmad Fahmi Mohd Samsudin said the move would only narrow students’ perspective on politics.

“How will they get exposure if they are blocked at every turn? The decision should be the student’s to make. Don’t restrain them, given them more freedom to make their own choices,” he said.

University Pertanian Malaysia student council president Iqbal Ismat Nordin said by doing so, the government will stifle students with leadership qualities.

“Let’s face it, even before the amendments, students have been bringing their respective political ideologies on campus. The only thing this will do is make it official.

“But more importantly, it will deprive them of garnering more skills outside and getting a head start in the real world.”

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia student council president Ahmad Muzammil Muhd Hairi slammed the move, and said it was restrictive.

“Those involved in politics outside will surely be active in campus as well. The restrictions will not work,” he said.

Former Universiti Teknologi Mara student council president Ridhwan Mat Salleh however, was fully supportive of the move.

“We understand that the government does not want the student to be distracted from their studies and become overly-immersed in politics. Besides, students who have political aspirations make up only five to 10 per cent of the student popu-
"The amendments will also enable new faces to enter the student elections, and not restrict it to the same characters."