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AUKU repeal must be followed by reforms, say academicians

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Page 1 of 2

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KOTA KINABALU: The repeal of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (AUKU) will only be meaningful if it is followed by changes in university administration culture, including strengthening institutional autonomy and guaranteeing academic freedom and diversity of views, according to two academicians.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) senior lecturer Associate Professor Dr Romzi Ationg said academic freedom must be supported by clear guidelines to distinguish between academic freedom and responsibility.

"Academic freedom must be guaranteed through university autonomy, protection of differing views and clear guidelines distinguishing academic freedom, student activism and disciplinary violations within a mature and responsible democratic environment," he told Bernama.

He said students should have the space to criticise the government, university policies or political leaders based on facts and in a respectful manner without fear of disciplinary action but such freedom must be accompanied by responsibility, including respecting the law, maintaining public order and avoiding defamation, incitement and threats to security.

Romzi said that once AUKU is repealed, the limits of student freedom should not be determined unilaterally by the government or university administration, but should instead be based on clear laws, human rights principles and reasonable academic regulations.

He said checks and balances should be strengthened through genuinely autonomous university governance bodies, independent appeal procedures and transparent complaints mechanisms, while student representation was important to ensure justice and accountability.

"The repeal of AUKU does not necessarily mean unrestricted political freedom. Students should be allowed to engage in politics inside and outside campus, but remain subject to general laws, security regulations and academic principles. What is important is that such limits must be reasonable, clear, consistent and not used to silence criticism, in order to strengthen the country's democracy," he said.



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SUMMARIES

CKOTA KINABALU: The repeal of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (AUKU) will only be meaningful if it is followed by changes in university administration culture, including strengthening institutional autonomy and guaranteeing academic freedom and diversity of views, according to two academicians. Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) senior lecturer Associate Professor Dr Romzi Ationg said academic freedom must be supported by clear guidelines to distinguish between academic freedom and responsibility.