

## Malaysia

### UUCA meant to protect public funds, says Dr M

By Adib Zalkapli



Dr Mahathir (left) with Rafidah at the Malaysia Europe Forum today. —  
 Picture by Jack Ooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 30 — Tun Mahathir said today that preventing tertiary students from politics protects taxpayers' money.

The ex-prime minister defended the University and University Colleges Act (UUCA), which prohibits students from being participating in politics, by saying since universities feed on public funds, it would be unfair to taxpayers if those students were distracted.

“It is the public that willingly allows the government to run universities,” said Dr Mahathir at the Malaysia Europe Forum here.

“When you are studying, instead of studying you spend your time demonstrating, you are wasting public money,” he said when asked about the future of the UUCA.

The UUCA, enacted in the 1970s bans university students from participating in political activities even off-campus.

Recently Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin had asked the government to lift the restriction, while Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said that his administration was open to discussion on the law.

The law was seen as a reaction to a series of student demonstrations led by then youth activist Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is currently the opposition leader.

Today Dr Mahathir described the 1970s demonstrations as disruptive.

“They were very disruptive and they were not doing well in their studies,” said Dr Mahathir.

The former prime minister for 22 years however pointed out he was involved in politics as a student, despite strict restrictions during colonial periods on student activism.

“I was involved in politics during colonial days. In colonial days if you were involved in politics, you lose your scholarships,” said Dr Mahathir.

His former Cabinet member, Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz who was moderating Dr Mahathir's session later gave a personal account on how classes were disrupted during the pre-UUCA days.

“Anwar Ibrahim was a student of mine, look at what happen to him now?” said Rafidah used to lecture at Universiti Malaya.

“A lot of classes were disrupted Tun. Even my class, it was so disruptive,” she told the forum.