

30 JUN 2001

UM-Fire

NO MERCY FOR THOSE INVOLVED IN FIRE, SAYS UM VICE CHANCELLOR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 30 (Bernama) -- The Universiti Malaya (UM) administration will have no mercy for any student or university staff if they are found to be involved in the fire that destroyed the university's Dewan Tunku Canselor (DTC) early yesterday morning.

UM Vice Chancellor Datuk Dr Anuar Zaini Mohd Zain said today if it was found that students were involved, the UM administration would not hesitate to expel them.

He said if there were any staff or lecturer involved, action would be taken according to university procedures.

Anuar Zaini said this after the official opening of the symposium on setting the direction of idealism of undergraduates in the new millennium by Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin at the UM Campus here.

The fire at the DTC, which was supposed to be the venue for the symposium, did not dampen the spirit of its organisers, "Yayasan Penggerak Wawasan", to proceed with the agenda by changing the venue from the DTC to the auditorium Kompleks Perdana Siswa.

Anuar Zaini also warned students, staff and lecturers not to be involved in any attempt to prevent Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad from coming to the UM campus tomorrow for the symposium's closing ceremony.

He said there were pamphlets distributed in the campus instigating students and university staff to prevent Dr Mahathir from attending and closing the symposium by staging a protest gathering in the campus.

He said police assistance had been sought to control the situation and the university's security guards would take stern action by evicting irresponsible elements from the campus.

Meanwhile in KUALA KILANG, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said "This is just at UM, we fear that this matter will spread to other institutions."

The fire had destroyed a national artifact which had left significant impact to thousands of Malaysians who had studied and taught at the university, he said after officiating the general meeting of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of Sekolah Menengah Datuk Undang Musa today.

Meanwhile, former UM Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Syed Hussein Al-Attas said the fire at the DTC could possibly be due to poor maintenance. He also did not rule out the possibility of sabotage.

"I feel this needs clarification, whether it was due to sabotage or (poor) maintenance. If it was not an act of sabotage, then the university administration must take responsibility," he said when contacted by Bernama here.

He also questioned why the university's security unit failed to detect the fire when it was in the initial stage before spreading to the whole building.

He believed that if the fire was caused by arsonists then the people responsible must have been truly professionals as not everyone could do it including choosing the time in the early morning.

Former UM Deputy Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Abu Bakar Hamid, who had served the UM for 34 years, expressed sadness if the fire had been caused by arsonists.

"It's very sad that there are still people who want to destroy

government property which are very useful to the public," he said.

Meanwhile, Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein called on the UM Board to take full responsibility for the fire which he said could possibly be due to an act of sabotage by a small section of students who were anti-government and masterminded by a certain group.

"If unchecked, such irresponsible act of sabotage could spread in the campus and influencing other students who might also be dragged into militant acts," he said.

He said the UM Board must be more pro-active in curbing external influences trying to instil the feeling of hatred against the government besides carrying out militant activities in the campus.

Several incidents, including the publication of the magazine "Varsiti 2001" and the distribution of pamphlets, had shown that there were a group of students involved who were trying to influence other students against the government, he said.

Hishammuddin, who is also Youth and Sports Minister, called on the students to come forward with information to help in identifying the people involved.

Meanwhile, Muhyiddin said the DTC had brought sweet memories to many national leaders including himself.

"I still remember about 30 years ago when I went up the stage to receive my degree," he told reporters after officiating the symposium.

He said he was not the only one because there were thousands of others who were either professionals or national leaders who graduated from Universiti Malaya, and they would certainly feel the loss.

About 1,000 students representing 15 public universities throughout the country are attending the two-day symposium.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who was a UM lecturer for 10 years, said she was deeply saddened by the incident.

"If it's true that it had been an act of sabotage, I most strongly condemn it...if it's true that it was the work of arsonists, then it shows that they have no sense of humanity at all, it's not only that they, if they were students, do not place any importance to education, they are also stepping on the symbol of national education because Dewan Tunku Canselor was the first hall of the first university in Malaysia," she said.

Rafidah proposed that all graduates who received their degrees from Universiti Malaya come forward and contribute in the rebuilding of the hall.

"I will propose to members of Wanita Umno whose children graduated from the university or those members who are graduates of Universiti Malaya themselves to come forward to contribute whatever they can," said Rafidah who is also head of Wanita Umno.

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