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USM to hold dialogues between national figures, students

PENANG, Mon. - More frequent dialogues between national figures and students - via intellectual forums - will enable Universiti Sains Malaysia to ensure that its students do not resort to "underground" activities while on campus.

By allowing them more freedom of expression through these discourses, USM Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dzulkifli Abdul Razak today said students would be better focused in their studies, if they were allowed to raise their concerns over current issues in a productive manner.

The platform for these discussions will be the university's Wacana Malaysiana dialogue series, which was launched in July.

"Although we have had no overt reason to be concerned with our lecturers and students given the developments which have occurred in the past few weeks, we may need to be more vigilant against militant movements being formed here."

He was speaking to reporters after Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon launched the two-day "National Ecology and Modelling Workshop" at USM's main campus in Minden here.

Dzulkifli was commenting on Press reports today quoting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad saying that university lecturers and other staff who used students to undermine the Government would be removed.

With over 2,000 academic staff at its three campuses in Penang and Kelantan, Dzulkifli said no negative feedback on the performance of its lecturers had been received.

USM's student population is 23,000.

"Our other channels of feedback includes our students, the campus community and external sources which we verify through existing mechanisms," he said.

When asked whether a "Speaker's Corner" which used to be part of USM's backdrop in the early 1970s would be re-introduced so students could voice their concerns on current issues, Dzulkifli did not discount the possibility.

"We must first ensure that students know what intellectual discourse is about.

"Until and unless they understand the decorum needed for such exchanges via our forums, a Speaker's Corner could be counter-productive."

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