

## **Aziz Bari slams minister over quit call**

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**by S Pathmawathy**

Pointing out the law and the constitution to members of the public is not politicking, says law professor Abdul Aziz Bari, lashing out at criticism that he should quit the academia and become a politician.

"I was just talking about the law and the constitution, which is somehow difficult to be disentangled from politics.

"Furthermore, I was talking to the ordinary people, not to an academic audience. I believe they have every right to know about the constitution and how to make it able to deliver," the Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) lecturer added.

Aziz was responding to the call by Higher Education Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin that Aziz resigns as an academician if he insisted on "taking part in politics".

Khaled's statement, widely reported by the Malay language newspapers, came after Aziz took part in ceramah organised by the opposition PKR in the minister's Pasir Gudang parliamentary constituency over the weekend.

Aziz said Khaled's comments were in stark contrast to the position taken by Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, who constantly encourages tertiary students to be involved in politics, in spite of laws that prohibit them from doing so.

"For one thing, his deputy, Saifuddin, has been saying that it is fine for students to take part in politics. I think academicians have an even greater right, or perhaps duties, to be in politics," Aziz said.

Noting the Court of Appeal's declaration last Monday that Section 15 of the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (UCA) was unconstitutional, he added: "He (Khaled) also should be aware that university regulations are not laws, strictly speaking.

"As such, these are subject to the laws of the land, particularly to the constitution as the supreme law of the land.

'Treat academicians as public intellectuals'

"If that (the talk) is seen as politics, then perhaps we should throw away the constitution and make this country a one-party or an authoritarian one."

The Court of Appeal in a 2-1 landmark decision declared Section 15 (5) (a) of the UUCA, which bars university students from being involved in politics, unconstitutional and as such, null and void.

Article 4 of the constitution states that the constitution is the supreme law of the federation and any law passed after Merdeka Day that is inconsistent with the constitution shall, to the extent of inconsistency, be void.

Rebuking Khaled (right) for his criticism, Aziz said if he had given the speech on an Umno platform, there would not be a problem.

The minister, he added, should explain the government's stand on cases where academicians have been involved in party politics.

"Some academicians went around - as part of their lobbying for senior posts in the universities - saying publicly that (Opposition Leader) Anwar Ibrahim was guilty of sodomy. This is obviously a crime as the case is still on going in court. It is subjudice.

"What about those senior professors who took part in preparing the draft of the Umno president's keynote address?

"What about those academicians and professors who have been regular speakers in Biro Tata Negara programmes or Islam Hadhari workshops (this is obviously political, as it is the policy of Umno)," Aziz asked.

Khaled, he added, should be mindful that universities "are not factories or nurseries" and that academicians should be treated as "public intellectuals".