

Saifuddin 'shocked' after rector stops UIA forum
Malaysiakini.com
November 22 ,2011
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Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah has expressed incredulity over Universiti Islam Antarabangsa's (UIA) 'sudden' cancellation of his meeting with students last night.

"I am shocked... but that is the university's decision and I shall respect it.

"She (UIA rector Zaleha Kamaruddin) is my rector, that is our university, the fact that my programme with students is not allowed, I shall not comment further and will leave it at that," he said when approached by reporters in the Parliament lobby today.

Asked if the move infringed upon student rights, he reserved comment.

"As this matter happened to me, I shall not comment," replied the deputy minister.

Saifuddin confirmed that the UIA authorities had issued a letter to organisers of the event instructing them to cancel the dialogue session mere hours before he was to arrive at the campus.

His special officer was only informed about the matter at 3pm yesterday when arriving at the university to meet the organisers.

The special officer told reporters that he was later informed of this by deputy rector Nik Ahmad Kamil.

The session was "cancelled and postponed to a later date on instructions of UIA rector Zaleha Kamaruddin on grounds that the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) issue is still a hot topic", the officer said.

UUCA too hot to handle?

Saifuddin, who is seen as a comparatively open minded and outspoken Umno leader, was scheduled to attend the dialogue with UIA students last night to discuss his electronic book titled Kalau Saya Mahasiswa (If I were a university student).

Published in 2009, this is the Temerloh MP's fifth book.

The dialogue organised by the Law Students Association was to have been held at the main auditorium.

Among others, it was to discuss whether the UUCA suppresses students and how universities can monitor the political involvement of students.

Last month, the Court of Appeal ruled that Section 15(5) of the UUCA, which bans students from participating in politics, is unconstitutional as it violates the freedom of expression.

Since then, the government has been under pressure not to appeal against the judgement, but no decision has been made so far.

Saifuddin, along with Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin and MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu, are among a handful of BN leaders who have urged the government to abide by the court's decision and to proceed to amend the law.

UIA, a public university, drew flak when it suspended law professor Abdul Aziz Bari for six days over his comment on the Selangor sultan's decree related to the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department's search of a church compound in Damansara Utama on Aug 3.

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