

UUCA debate disruption: Saifuddin wants answers
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Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah is demanding answers for Universiti Malaya's (UM) Student Affairs Department's (HEP) attempt to disrupt a Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) debate last night.

"I am saddened that the UUCA debate at UM last night was aborted. I am investigating," he said in a posting on microblogging site Twitter.

The event in UM which began at 9pm was between the two main campus political rivals, Pro-Mahasiswa which is anti-UUCA and Pro-Aspirasi which favours the law.

When contacted, Independent Undergraduate Activists Group (Kami) president Haziq Abdullah Abdul Aziz said the debate managed to conclude but was marred by several attempts by campus security to abort it.

"When they started disrupting us, it was the question-and-answer session, about four security guards tried to stop the debate on the instructions of (the deputy vice-chancellor) Rohana Yusof (left).

"They turned off our lights but we kept switching them back on," he said.

However, Haziq Abdullah said the guards did not attempt to stop them from speaking or storm the stage.

"Our Student Representative Council president Mohd Syahid called Rohana and negotiated with her to exercise discretion and allow the debate to proceed."

Rohana refused, added Haziq Abdullah, but it managed to buy the undergraduates enough time to conclude the event which drew 300 undergraduates at 10.15pm.

Should be permit free

On HEP's reason for the disruption that it was due the failure to obtain prior consent, Haziq Abdullah insisted that being merely an academic event it was unnecessary.

"We never intended to obtain permission because it was an academic event and it is the rights of undergraduates. What is the rationale for disrupting us?"

Meanwhile, Kami secretary-general Khairul Naim in a statement today condemned the university's action.

"UM's HEP action was as if the undergraduates had threatened the security of the university when it was simply an academic debate... what do they fear?"

"The HEP is no longer relevant and should be abolished. What does it mean to be undergraduates when we are forced to be 'yes men'?"

He called on the university to cease stonewalling academic programmes and allow UM to return to its glory days when such events were freely held.

"We stand firm that the UUCA must be abolished to free the grip on undergraduate and return 'soul' to universities."

Last month, Saifuddin had expressed incredulity when Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) pulled the plug on a similar UUCA forum to which he had been invited.

The forums came after the High Court in October ruled that section 15 of the UUCA which prevents undergraduates from participating in politics is unconstitutional.

The government has said it will appeal the decision but in the meantime will move to amend that particular law.

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