

'UUCA amendment will revive academic freedom'

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Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said the proposed amendment to the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) will open the door to revive the "true spirit" of universities and academic freedom.

He told a forum today that although the main purpose of the amendment, as announced by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, is to give political rights to the students, it is also an opportunity to rectify other weaknesses of the nation's higher education institutions.

The Umno supreme council member stressed that all academicians in local universities must be given academic freedom, which allows them to openly discuss the subjects of their expertise inside and outside the campus without breaching the laws.

forum pru13 undi siapa jadi penentu 131211 saifuddin abduallah"Even if action is taken against them outside of the campus (due to their statements), the campus should defend them," he said.

Saifuddin (right) was speaking at a forum in Shah Alam organised by Malay daily Sinar Harian, entitled '13th General Election: Whose Votes Will Decide?'.
Section 3 of the Act more important

Saifuddin was responding to the comments by Parti Kita president Zaid Ibrahim that the real problem of UUCA was not Section 15 which bans students from participating in politics but the absence of academic freedom in the country.

"As long as the minister has the power to appoint vice-chancellors and deans of the universities, academic mediocrity will continue. Section 3 (of the Act) is more important, it gives power to the minister," said Zaid.

forum pru13 undi siapa jadi penentu 131211 zaid ibrahim Agreeing fully with Zaid's (left) statement, Saifuddin pledged that the amendment will look into all aspects of higher education.

Saifuddin and Zaid were on a five-member panel that also comprised DAP secretary-general and Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar and Universiti Malaya media studies lecturer Prof Abu Hassan Hasbullah.

Being the only representative from BN, Saifuddin kept his cool when he was jeered several times by a group of aggressive people in the audience when he attempted to defend the government's policies.

On the government's decision to appeal against the court ruling that UUCA is unconstitutional, Saifuddin revealed that several BN leaders are lobbying the government to change its mind, including Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin, MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu and himself.

Lim then invited Saifuddin and his colleagues in Parliament to support a bipartisan parliamentary petition to urge the government to withdraw the appeal, but the latter did not respond to it.

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