

'Suspension proves UUCA amendments have failed'

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The unjust punishment meted out to a student by Universiti Malaysia Perlis (Unimap) has proven that the recent amendments to the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) are cosmetic and severely inadequate, said an opposition MP.

NONE "It also exposed how the amendments fell far short of what is required to give Malaysians students the necessary room to express themselves freely," said DAP's Petaling Jaya Utara MP Tony Pua in a statement today.

Mohd Zaini Izuwan, 25 (left), has been slapped with a 66-day academic suspension and RM100 fine for supposedly organising a programme to raise awareness of voting, allegedly linked with pro-opposition groups.

The incident was reported by Malaysiakini last Saturday, just two days after the UUCA was amended purportedly to give students greater freedom.

Motion rejected

Pua pointed out that while the new Amendment Bill has taken a step forward by allowing students to join political parties, the new Act will still give absolute discretion to the university authorities to determine activities and societies deemed 'detrimental' to the interest of the institution.

"For example, Clause 15(2)(b) the amended UUCA Bill says explicitly that university students will not be allowed to join any organisations, societies or groups of persons (with the exception of political parties) deemed inappropriate by the University Board.

"In addition, Clause 15(4)(b) also allows the university to deny the rights of its students to speak, even on his or her subject of study, in any symposium or seminar organised by any organisation or person(s) deemed inappropriate by the university," he said.

Last Thursday Pua had moved a motion to make the relevant amendments to the above clauses in Parliament, but the move was rejected by Higher Education Minister Khaled Nordin and the BN MPs.

"The minister had given an assurance that the new amendments will not be abused and that the universities are sufficiently enlightened to use their discretion over the above matters.

"However, as shown clearly over the above unjustified actions of Unimap, even if Zaini had indeed organised the event to 'raise public awareness of the importance of voting' - which he has denied, the new amendments fell far short of granting academic and political freedom to the university students."

Khaled urged to lift suspension

Hence Pua called upon Khaled to reprimand the Unimap authorities for taking such harsh and unjustified actions against a student of the university who did not commit any wrong against the institution.

"At the same time, we call upon the minister to immediately lift Zaini's suspension to prove that he was sincere in his objective to make Malaysian universities premier institutions of holistic learning and not centres for thought imprisonment," he added.

NONE Zaini had told Malaysiakini that he was accused of organising the programme at a restaurant in Kangar on Jan 13 which involved 14 student groups from Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

The program, named 'Watch 13', is an initiative by a student coalition to raise public awareness of the importance of voting in the coming general election.

The university accused Zaini's actions of adversely impacting the institution, and had issued a stern warning to the final-year student.

Zaini has protested his innocence, saying that he was at the event as an observer and not an organiser. He also complained that he was not allowed to bring any witnesses or to question the 'prosecution' witnesses during the disciplinary hearing.

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