

DAP backs ex-deputy minister on UM stand
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Former deputy higher education minister Saifuddin Abdullah's decision to quit his association with Universiti Malaya after the government was seen as muffling academicians has received the backing of DAP.

DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng said that attempts to curb academic freedom was not new in Malaysia and had already affected the quality of university institutions.

He stressed that such tactics should be jointly condemned by all and reversed.

"It is now clear that Prof Redzuan Othman (left) has been punished for being professional, factual and simply doing his job as a non-partisan researcher, and removed because his findings do not concur with the government of the day," he said in a press statement.

"Even though Saifuddin is a BN leader, DAP fully supports his stance in standing up for Prof Redzuan, and the principles of academic freedom.

"DAP condemns the BN federal government for the increasingly oppressive manner in which students and academics are treated," he added.

Redzuan's tenure as the dean of arts and social science faculty in the university was ended on June 30, without renewal.

At the same time, Saifuddin confirmed that there was pressure by the Ministry of Education for the history professor to quit as head of the UM Centre for Election and Democracy (Umcedel), set up in 2012.

Saifuddin had told Malaysiakini that he also resigned as a senior research fellow in UM as a sign of protest over what had happened to Redzuan.

Umcedel's research results did not often favour the ruling BN government.

Meanwhile, Lim said that academic freedom does not appear in the lexicon of the Education Ministry.

"Draconian laws such as the University and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Educational Institutions (Discipline) Act 1976 must be abolished and there must be immediate cessation of tactics of intimidation and oppression on academics," he added.

He warned that failure to do so would not only destroy academic freedom but also stifle

academic excellence where Malaysian universities continue to deteriorate, exemplified by the fact that no single local university managed to enter the top 100 Time Higher Education Asia University Rankings 2014.

Lim noted that besides the recent UM case, Putrajaya also intervened to suspend constitutional law expert Abdul Aziz Bari from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) for questioning the Sultan of Selangor's decree in the raid of the Damansara Utama Methodist Centre in October 2011.

He further noted that this year alone, disciplinary action has been taken against 25 university students for various reasons including attending public assemblies, demonstrating with anti-TPPA placards and posting anti-GST comments on Facebook.

And overseas, he said, the Public Services Department also threatened the scholarship of a final-year Australian National University student for taking part in a university forum that featured DAP MP Tony Pua.

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