

Fate of student campaigners in the hold
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A special committee within the Higher Education Ministry will decide what to do with the students that were allegedly campaigning for political parties in the recent Ijok state by-election.

The Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) 1971 forbids public university students from participating in political activities. Students violating the act risk expulsion.

On Sunday, Education Minister Mustapa Mohamed told reporters that some 30 students from public universities in the Klang Valley were found to have campaigned in the week running up to Saturday's election.

"[They students are] free to voice their opinions but through the proper channels," he was quoted as saying by Bernama.

Mustapa is currently on a working trip in Saudi Arabia, according to ministry officials when contacted today.

It is learnt that the minister is likely to chair the committee that will comprise of deputy vice-chancellors (student affairs) of public tertiary institutions.

A youth group has expressed great concern over the weekend statement, calling it a stab at the right of young citizens to witness an election.

"We are very concerned about the kind of action taken against young people who were there as observers," said Lee Khai Loon, convener of Youth for Change (Y4C), when contacted today.

Y4C took some 40 students to by-election on what it called an 'exposure trip.'

"There shouldn't be any discriminatory action to the young people who have the right to go and see the by-election," added Lee.

Government's right

The ministry has maintained that it was within its right in persecuting students found to violate the UUCA.

"The ministry acknowledges certain student segments [within public universities] are contesting the UUCA. But what the students must understand is that they shouldn't be there at all, under the context of the act," said a ministry senior officer

The officer added that the ministry would come down just as hard on those found campaigning for the ruling government.

"It doesn't matter whether they were campaigning for BN or PKR. We will come down just as hard," he said.

On Sunday, Mustapa had said that students can air their opinions including government criticisms at special forums organised by the ministry.

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