

# Don't punish students over protest stunt, says Anwar

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has instructed the Higher Education Ministry and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) not to hinder the academic progress of students involved in a recent anti-corruption rally, which included the burning of a caricature resembling him.

Senior Press Secretary to the Prime Minister, Tunku Nashrul Abaidah said during the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) daily briefing that the students' actions at the Gempur Rasuah Sabah 2.0 rally on Saturday should be viewed in the context of youths courageously expressing their views on issues of integrity and corruption.

He said the act of burning the caricature during the assembly was a symbol of unwavering reform, and as a former student activist and reformist himself, the Prime Minister consistently defends freedom of expression as enshrined in the Constitution.

"This incident reminds us of the people's deep hope for corruption to be eradicated from its roots.

"The Prime Minister himself emerged from the student movement and once led reformist demonstrations in the streets, so he truly understands that voice.

"He has witnessed that criticism, no matter how harsh, is an essential part of celebrating democracy," Tunku Nashrul said, Bernama reported.

The Suara Mahasiswa UMS group had organised the rally, which involved marching through Kota Kinabalu city carrying placards highlighting various issues in Sabah, such as corruption and the state's water supply.

During the rally, a caricature of Anwar was set on fire.

Tunku Nashrul said Anwar emphasised that the spirit of change begins with the courage of young people to speak the truth, grounded in facts and with sincere intent.

"On the government's part, the reform commitment remains strong (and) already being translated into real, actionable steps.

"This commitment will not stop here and will continue to be refined and implemented in a structured manner," he said.