

'Don't expel students who protested

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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has advised Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) not to expel students involved in the recent Gempur Rasuah Sabah 2.0 rally, where protesters burned a caricature of him.

His senior press secretary Tunku Nashrul Abaidah said Anwar remains committed to freedom of expression as enshrined in the Federal Constitution, particularly among youth.

"The prime minister understands that spirited protest is part of democratic expression.

"Although he was the subject of criticism, he believes reform must be grounded in the courage of youth to speak out with sincerity and facts," said Nashrul at the daily briefing of the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir said Anwar had personally called him to convey this message.

"For him, even if a mistake was made, their future must take precedence. This shows his compassion. Although he was the direct target, he wants the university to consider the bigger picture."

While acknowledging the constitutional right to assemble, Zambry said such freedoms must still operate within legal boundaries relating to public safety and order.

On Monday, Sabah Police Commissioner Datuk Jauteh Dikun said police are investigating nine offences related to the protest, including incitement, open burning in a public place, possession of hazardous materials and raising sensitive 3R issues – race, religion, and royalty.

Thirteen students identified from the rally could face disciplinary action under the Universities and University Colleges Act, which may include suspension or expulsion.

The rally, organised by student group Suara Mahasiswa UMS on Saturday, aimed to highlight issues of corruption and the ongoing water crisis in Sabah.

In a post on X on June 23, an individual identifying as UMS student Fadhil Kasim said he had burned a caricature of Anwar during the rally at Lintasan Deasoka on June 22, defending the act as a reflection of Anwar's own past as a student activist.

He said in the 1970s, Anwar, the then president of the University of Malaya's Malay Language Society, led a protest and burned Tunku Abdul Rahman's book *13 Mei*, labelling it subversive.

Fadhil expressed concern that the government was not doing enough to address alleged corruption in Sabah, particularly involving members of the GRS coalition, and claimed that Anwar appeared to be focusing more on political alliances than on reforms.

– By **Harith Kamal**