

Flag incident no impact on amending UUCA, says deputy minister

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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 19 — The government remains committed to amend a university law to provide for greater academic freedom despite last Saturday's flag incident, Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said today.

The deputy minister for Higher Education sought to soothe undergraduate anxieties after lashing out at student activists who had lowered Datuk Seri Najib Razak's flag in front of the Umno headquarters here on Saturday, an act he had repeatedly described as "contemptible".

"I wish to state that the incident has not disturbed the government's commitment to amend the UUCA," Saifuddin (picture) said, referring to the Universities and University Colleges Act.

The Umno deputy minister is among several from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) who have backed a proposal to amend the university law for greater academic freedom.

In the Saturday afternoon incident, student activists representing Solidariti Anak Malaysia had demonstrated outside the Umno building before Saifuddin agreed to meet them and accept a six-point demand from the rally after staging a sit-down protest a few roads away.

He said he believed in "undergraduate idealism" and supported their right to freedom of expression in a democracy, adding that "the flag-lowering incident is not a part of the democracy that is meant".

Saifuddin, who chaired a roundtable on the proposal for the law, said talks were going well and would be continued to seek wider and more open views.

"It strengthens the commitment to uphold true democracy that is desired by amending the UUCA," he said in a statement today.

He said the committee to amend the UUCA will begin shortly and expects the government would be ready to present the revised law in Parliament next year.

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