

Saifuddin says will fight for all students, even detractors
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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 22 — Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah today pledged to defend the rights of all students to assemble and voice their views, even those who had demanded he take responsibility over last Saturday's "banner incident."

Nearly 200 undergraduates gathered outside the Higher Education Ministry building in Putrajaya yesterday to show support to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and demand Saifuddin resign as deputy minister of Higher Education and as an Umno supreme council member.

The group called themselves the Aspirasi Undergraduate Leaders' Alumni Society (Aspirasi).

The undergraduates were reacting to Saifuddin's actions in the wake of a street protest last Saturday outside the Umno headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, during which a supporter of two student movements, Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM) and the Movement for Academic Freedom (Bebas), had lowered from a flagpole a banner bearing Najib's likeness before raising it again.

"In my view, they have a right to gather and voice out their concerns. I will defend their rights.

"I have also been informed that some of those who were present are undergraduates. To them, I wish to state that my love for them has not changed," Saifuddin said in a statement today.

The deputy minister further said he had invited the student group to meet him in Parliament at 12.15pm today, but that his request was rejected.

He also said that Aspirasi president Mohd Shahar Abdullah and some other students had met him last night during a debate programme in UPM, during which they passed him a memorandum.

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