

Aziz Bari: Varsities won't reach pinnacle without academic freedom
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KAJANG, Jan 21 — Malaysia will not attain its goal of being the “Harvard of the East” if scholars continue to chase after positions instead of knowledge, Dr Abdul Aziz Bari said today.

The constitutional law expert lamented that many professors were known more for their administrative titles rather than their expertise in their fields of study, and chided them for losing sight of what was more important for academia.

He also said the nation’s higher learning institutions could only become world-class if the government adopted a more hands-off approach and did not stifle academic freedom for political reasons.

“Academic freedom is something which... is synonymous to universities,” he told students at a forum on academic freedom at Kolej Dar Al-Hikmah here.

“As long as this doesn’t happen, don’t even think about being the Harvard of the East. We can’t even compare with NUS (National University of Singapore).”

Aziz was suspended with pay from the International Islamic University (UIA) for criticising the Selangor Sultan’s intervention in the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) controversy as “uncommon and inconsistent”.

His suspension triggered a rash of student protests urging the university to reinstate the law don for the sake of academic freedom.

The outspoken academic is currently the subject of an ongoing internal probe by UIA over his remarks on the Selangor Sultan.

He is also being investigated by police and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC).

Aziz told Malaysiakini in an interview published last month he was considering a career in politics now that his time at the university appeared to be coming to an end.

He is reportedly eyeing the Sabak Bernam parliamentary seat currently held by Abdul Rahman Bakri, who is due to enter his defence in June on nine counts of making false claims.

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