

Government can improve student loan management, admits Saifuddin
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 17 — Putrajaya should take heed of the demands made by the students occupying Dataran Merdeka in their protest against the National Higher Education Fund (PTPTN) loan scheme, said Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah.

The deputy higher education minister said the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government must be mindful of improving the way it manages the PTPTN, suggesting that it “religiously” studies the proposal made by Umno Youth based on feedback from a recent roundtable.

“The PTPTN is an issue that is very near and dear to the students. Hence I understand their sentiments. Although I disagree with their demand (of abolishing PTPTN), but I can sense their boldness in expressing themselves this way,” said Saifuddin (picture).

“On our part, we should take cognisance that we should improve our ways in managing the PTPTN.”

Although he condemned the protestors’ use of funeral wreaths, he was happy that all parties involved in the demonstration acted in the spirit of the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011.

“Assemblies and demonstrations are part of democracy. It is their right,” he pointed out.

Saifuddin also called for the students to end their demonstration quickly as their message had been heard.

The varsity students have been occupying the square in shifts since Saturday to call for free education and the abolition of the PTPTN.

They have vowed to stay put until the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28, or when their demands are met.

But Saifuddin said Dataran Merdeka would be hosting a royal concert on April 21 in honour of the 14th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who ascended to the throne earlier this month.

“Students would do well to respect the Agong in this context,” he said.

Hundreds of student activists marched across the city centre on April 14, calling for free tertiary education and an end to BN rule.

Safwan Anang, chairman of Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM), an umbrella group of student movements, pointed out that it would take only an outlay of RM2.2 billion each year to wipe out PTPTN debts.

The Najib administration has insisted that Pakatan Rakyat’s (PR) plans to end the federal student loan scheme will cost RM43 billion and bankrupt the nation.

But the opposition insists its plan to wipe out student debt under PTPTN would only cost RM25 billion as the RM43.6 billion figure quoted by BN represented all approved loans and not the real amount disbursed.

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