

UMS students to go ahead with protest

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KOTA KINABALU: A group of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) students are resolute in their stance to stage an upcoming protest on water issues plaguing the institution despite a stern warning from their vice-chancellor.

#KamiMahuAir Sabah secretariat coordinator, Mohammad Norhamdin Nordin, 23, from the university's Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, said this is because the scope for this planned protest is broader as they will be expressing dissatisfaction on water problems affecting not only UMS but the state of Sabah as a whole.

Norhamdin dismissed Vice-Chancellor Datuk Prof Datuk Dr Kasim Mansor's caution to call off the event on the grounds of it possibly disturbing the students' studies, saying that the longstanding water predicament has already been negatively affecting them as they have to worry about how they are going to take showers and use the toilet before or after going to classes.

He also brushed off Kasim's other reason to not hold the demonstration which is Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Ts Mustapha Sakmud is already closely monitoring the situation and conducting frequent visits to the university, claiming that Mustapha's promise to settle the issue by June 6 has yet to be fulfilled.

In addition, Norhamdin informed that the secretariat on Thursday had handed over a notice to the police to inform of the protest and it was received with a stamp of approval, in response to Kasim saying that UMS has never encouraged its student groups to hold public protests without authorisation from the authorities.

"To me, it seems as if the vice-chancellor does not fully understand the purpose of this gathering and a statement was issued in a rush, as if the movement this time around is only about problems affecting UMS, when in reality, it involves a bigger context faced by the people of Sabah.



Norhamdin (centre) and the rest of the secretariat holding up the memorandum of demands.

This gathering will be a manifestation of students demolishing the 'Ivory Tower' to stand with the rakyat, so for me, this is our main message – if the rakyat are affected, the students will not keep silent.

Mohammad Norhamdin Nordin

"Decades have passed since Sabah achieved independence and merged to form Malaysia, but the issue of water supply is still a bane to the people of the nation, with not only UMS students affected, but the rakyat outside have also been burdened by this prolonged water crisis in Sabah.

"Hence, we have formed a secretariat for the #KamiMahuAir gathering and will deliver a memorandum of demands to the Prime Minister, Chief Minister, Sabah Water Department (JANS) and Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC)," he told reporters at a press conference near Alamesra here on Friday.

There are six demands in the said memorandum, according to him. First, the authorities must ensure that the water needs of the people in Sabah are met with no excuses.

Second, the Federal government must intervene and help the Sabah government

in the water crisis affecting the state as Sabahans as soon as possible. Third, the MACC must immediately conduct an investigation to detect and take action against any possible misappropriation of funds for water projects in Sabah.

Fourth, it needs to be ensured that all bureaucratic loopholes blocking the solution to Sabah's water problems are resolved with urgency.

Fifth, the authorities must provide transparency by revealing the actual situation of Sabah's water supply conundrum. Sixth, a complete revamp is required on individuals who failed to manage water issues in Sabah.

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"Our hope from the gathering

is that any problems or misappropriations on the state's water supply can be resolved quickly. If this one does not succeed, we will hold more such movement in the future.

"We are giving a strong warning to the relevant authorities that if this issue is not resolved, then we will be more aggressive in demanding our rights.

"The students and rakyat of Sabah are called on to rise up from this oppression of rights. Standing up for one's rights is not a crime," said Norhamdin.

Around 100 people are expected to attend the demonstration, which is planned to be held in front of Menara Kinabalu here on June 14.

In a statement on Thursday, Kasim had urged students and the public to avoid participating in the protest to prevent any disruption to public order and to allow the other students to focus on their studies.

Kasim said the university believes that any issues should be addressed through the correct procedures and channels rather than through hasty actions.

He also said that there was no need for UMS students to hold demonstrations over water issues as Mustapha frequently visits the university to review the progress of water supply projects.