

Mustapha: UMS students used for political mileage

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KOTA KINABALU: Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Ts Mustapha Sakmud has expressed his concern of students being used by certain quarters for political mileage.

Commenting on the #KamiMahuAir demonstration organised by SuaraMahasiswa here on Friday, which has raised speculations on whether the protest was politically motivated, Mustapha said he is aware of such claims.

"Yes, I am aware of them but I hope that they are not true. We do not prevent students from voicing out their rights but we do not want them to be used by any quarters for political or personal benefits," he told reporters after officiating the Forum Belia Madani at University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) here on Saturday. Sabah Works Minister Datuk Ir Shahelmy Yahya, who came down to the demonstration on Friday afternoon to meet with the protesters, reportedly opined that the water demands is only an excuse for them to hold the protest.

Shahelmy had said that from the words being uttered by some of them, the gathering was more politically motivated and a game that they were playing just to get media attention.

It is believed that there are other reasons for the spread of such speculations.

According to reporters who were at the scene, members of several opposition parties were seen rallying together with the rest of the protesters.

A local portal also reported that nine people who took part in the rally were detained by police for not possessing identification card.

It was also noticed by reporters that during press conferences held by the organisers, they seemed to be unaware of Mustapha's proper titles, constantly referring to him as Tan Sri.

The above point begs the question on whether they had actually read and fully understood the many statements issued by the minister on the current water predicament at the university.

The protest coordinator, Mohammad Norhamdin Nordin, has since denied allegations of the protest being politically motivated and added that no political party was involved.

Norhamdin said that the presence of political figures at the demonstration was in their personal capacity.

On the nine individuals detained, he claimed that they included a teacher and eight students from a school in Likas which provides education to stateless children.

Meanwhile, Mustapha stressed that there is no misappropriation in the utilisation of the RM5 million allocated by the Prime Minister and his ministry for an alternative measure to alleviate UMS' water supply woes.

He said the allocation is fully utilised for the construction of the recently completed tube well project at the campus, which is able to provide an additional one million litres per day (mld) to the institution.

"I hope that UMS will lodge police reports against any other parties who try to dispute this matter as I do not want the image of the university to be tarnished by any quarters who attempt to push this issue for their organisational or political benefits.

"Act rationally, understand the real facts and do not misuse them for such benefits. These allegations are heavy and affect UMS' credibility, so I do not want this issue to be politicised or manipulated.

"They can call the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to investigate if they wish, but I would like to stress that the allocation is used solely to better the water supply problem at the university. There is no misappropriation whatsoever," he said.

To a question, Mustapha said he will leave it to the relevant authorities to take action on the protesters if any wrongdoings are found.

From his ministry's perspective, he said he does not wish to comment further as advice was already dispensed before the gathering and any breaking of the law is to be borne by the wrongdoers.

On the demonstrators' refusal



DATUK TS MUSTAPHA SAKMUD

to hand over a memorandum of demands concerning the water supply issue to Shahelmy as they insisted to meet the Chief Minister, Mustapha said he was disappointed.

"Their fight should be about how to solve this water supply issue. What is important is that they get their message across, not about who receives the memorandum.

"Their insistence to hand it over to the Chief Minister and no one else, not even to Shahelmy who is in charge of water matters, gives an unpleasant image and does not reflect the true identity of a student," he said.

When asked to comment on the protest attended by not only students, Mustapha admitted that Sabahans as a whole are affected by the water problem, and the Federal and State governments are doing their best to resolve it.

He said it is not an easy problem to solve in the nearest future and more time will be needed considering it is inherited by the previous governments.

"So what we are doing at the moment to improve the situation is through the construction of the tube wells, and we will also ask for the State Water Department (JANS) to stabilise the water supply going to the university including by carrying out mass operations to cut off any illegal connections.

"I will ask for more stricter action from JANS to be carried out periodically to ensure that the water supply reaches UMS without any disruptions from

illegal connections which often occur in squatter settlements here," he said.

In the same vein, Mustapha suggested for a forum to be held between UMS, SuaraMahasiswa and JANS to discuss and relay accurate and latest information on the water supply issue.

He invited SuaraMahasiswa to attend, reiterating that the main point should be to find a solution to the problem instead of simply being swept away by emotions.

"I hope that such a forum can be held so that such issues can be discussed and resolved harmoniously.

"This water problem is not only affecting UMS but many other institutions in the country.

"But what is important is engagements with the students so that they understand what is actually happening and we can then use the correct channels to bring up their grouses," he said.

On Friday, the #KamiMahuAir rally, which saw around 50 SuaraMahasiswa members walk for about 2.5 kilometres from UMS towards Menara Kinabalu where the Chief Minister's office is located, turned heated when Shahelmy and Sabah Youth and Sports Assistant Minister Datuk Fairuz Renddan arrived to meet them.

Upon seeing Shahelmy and Fairuz, one of the rally goers raised their voice demanding that they not to interfere with their program, and the situation escalated when no compromise between both sides forced the police to intervene to control the situation.

The rally goers also refused to hand over the memorandum to Shahelmy but insisted that they will only pass it personally to Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor.

Shahelmy had come down to see the group on behalf of the Chief Minister.

Kota Kinabalu police chief ACP Kasim Muda then informed the group that Fairuz had conveyed the message that Hajiji would meet the rally organiser next week and urged the group to disperse, but they refused to comply.

The protest ended on Saturday after the group who camped for 17 hours, failed to hand their six-point memorandum to Hajiji.