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It's their prerogative, minister says after some universities ban ex-debater from campus

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Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh says autonomous universities have sole discretion to decide who can and cannot be allowed on campus. — Picture by Saw Siew Feng

KUALA LUMPUR, March 9 — Autonomous universities have the right to decide who can and cannot be allowed on campus, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh said today.

He was weighing in on a recent uproar after former national debater Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman claimed to have been barred from speaking at several public universities.

"I wouldn't know that, it is the prerogative of the universities. Thirteen universities have been given autonomy because you want all universities to be given autonomy.

"So it's their decision. They have the right to decide whom should come in and whom should not come in," he told reporters when met outside the Dewan Rakyat here.

Asked his view if the ban was because of Syed Saddiq's open criticism towards the government, the minister said autonomous universities have sole discretion on their policies.

"I said they have been given autonomy," he said and proceeded to spell out the word to reporters.

Syed Saddiq won accolades after being judged Asia's Best Debater during the Asian British Parliamentary (ABP) Debating Championship last October, together with fellow International Islamic University scholar from Bangladesh, Mubarrat Wassey.

Last Friday, he emceed a press conference on the controversial "citizens' declaration" campaign led by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad seeking the ouster of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

He was reportedly banned from speaking at several local universities including Universiti Tenaga Nasional (Uniten) and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (Usim) after that event.