

Is racism alive in Oxford?
MalaysiaKini.com
February 20, 2012
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Many would find it difficult to believe that Oxford University could be linked with discrimination and racism. Well, they are wrong!

The details are sketchy and are only just emerging. Perhaps, there are those who would prefer they are never aired in the open.

Umno's racist policies are deeply entrenched in our psyche. The good thing is that both Malays and non-Malays are affected. The bad thing is that being thousands of miles away from Malaysia cannot dispel these racist tendencies.

In the second week of January 2012, the chairperson of Kelab Umno Oxford extended an invitation for a representative of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) to join a forum called "Sembang-sembang Santai Isu-isu Semasa Malaysia 2012" (Informal discussions on current issues in Malaysia 2012).

The event was held at the Blue Boar Lecture Theatre, Christchurch College, Oxford. The four-member panel had representatives from Kelab Umno UK, the United Kingdom and Eire Council of Malaysian students (UKEC), Kelab PAS and PKR. The moderator was visiting fellow, Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin.

The PKR representative for London informed Kelab Umno that he would attend. Twenty seats were allocated to Pakatan Rakyat supporters but only a handful came because of the short notice given.

Minutes before the start of the forum, hushed discussions took place and the PKR representative was banned. The reason? It is alleged that it was because he was "not Malay".

To replace him, another visiting professor, an elderly gentleman, possibly called Dr Ahmad, became the PKR substitute. As a visiting academician, he should have refused this role and warned the panel, then followed this up with a report to the university, as should Dr Mohd Asri himself. But they didn't.

And so, being Malaysian everyone carried on as normal.

Two videos of the forum were posted; one with sound, the other silent. Now, only the silent video remains. It is believed that the talk concentrated on Malay/Muslim issues. The forum was conducted entirely in Malay.

Members of the audience said that only the UKEC student representative and the substitute for PKR were good, and answered their questions directly and succinctly; unlike the PAS and Umno panel members who waffled a lot.

Some claim that Dr Asri dominated the discussions, and appeared to pressure the PAS and Umno panel members.

A few opined that the forum was a waste of time because it was badly organised, started late, and few current Malaysian issues were addressed - Malaysia is not just a nation of Malays and Muslims, who speak only Malay.

Perhaps, the event was another excuse for a 'bun-fight'; Kelab Umno events are renowned for generous spreads of Malaysian food.

Reputation tarnished

The organisers of this event have tarnished the reputation of Oxford University. Why invite a representative from PKR then drop him as he is about to walk on-stage?

There was a week in which they could have requested another person, but they probably did not want to risk being seen to be racist, by rejecting a non-Malay.

Is racism so sensitive that overseas Malaysians dare not broach the subject? Is racism so entwined in our psyche that Malaysians find it impossible to reject racist tendencies even when overseas?

What about the onlookers; the audience? Why did they keep silent and not make a stand? In England, racism is a crime. Perhaps, they were unaware of what transpired.

The treatment of the PKR representative and his supporters was despicable. Is this an Umno tactic, to invite the PKR representative then reject him in public, at the last minute, as the ultimate humiliation?

His travelling expenses, his time and his preparation were considerable. Then again, respect for other people has never been an Umno strong point.

The PKR representative had said that he would prefer to argue his points in English. So was he refused participation because he did not wish to speak Malay, or because he was not Malay?

That night, the PKR representative should have voiced his objections and followed this up with a complaint to the university for holding a discriminatory meeting. He should have done this immediately.

Why are we so afraid of the long arm of Umno's racist policies? Why can't we speak up? What are we afraid of?

The PKR representative when contacted said, "I didn't want to make an issue out of it as we were 'invited' guests to this event. We were clearly outnumbered. There were basically two non-Malays there.

"The University of Oxford frowns upon discrimination. This would have clearly breached their codes of conduct. Those involved would have been reprimanded.

"The 'visiting professor' who took my place didn't even acknowledge this fact nor inform the university about the events which transpired."

Clearly upset by events that night, he added: "We were appalled with the treatment we received at the forum. We didn't even wait for the conclusion of the event and left half way through.

"This was to be an active forum on pertinent issues regarding Malaysian politics and agendas. It was humiliating and derogatory that this was allowed to happen in England."

Other contentious incidents

In February 2010, at an Umno function in London, the visiting Umno executive secretary Abdul Rauf Yusoh denied that he allegedly called non-Malays bangsa asing who were trampling on the Malays in Tanah Melayu.

An accounting student had overheard Rauf say "Jangan biarkan bangsa asing pijak kepala kita." (Don't let the foreigners walk all over our heads.)

In July 2010, the University of Oxford hosted an event for Sarawak Chief Minister, Taib Mahmud (right).

There were protests outside the Said Business School against Taib's destruction of the environment and the treatment of the Penan people. The red carpet was laid out for Taib.

Last year, when the London School of Economics (LSE) was implicated in accepting over £2 million from the Gaddafi regime, the university's director, Sir Howard Davies, had to resign.

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