

**Umno and PAS, non-Malay have rights, too**  
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ADUN SPEAKS Over the past week, there have been several issues that have threatened to destabilise the peace and harmony that this country has long fought for.

The most recent is the intention by Petaling Jaya Utara Umno division deputy chief Mohamad Azli Mohamed Saad to propose that the fate of vernacular schools should be debated at the upcoming Umno general assembly.

Even worse was the immediate reaction by Cheras Umno division chief Syed Ali Alhabshee (right) who also supported that vernacular schools should be done away.

As far as I am concerned these statements are absolutely irresponsible and wrong. It seems that Umno's sudden attack on vernacular schools is just another one of the Malay party's usual hype that its members create for themselves to flex their "Ketuanan Melayu" (Malay supremacy) muscles to its members.

It is not surprising that each year, before, during and after the Umno General Assembly, that the party will disregard its BN allies such as MCA and MIC by churning such callous statements.

In setting the record straight however, while Umno has its right to champion the cause of the Malays, they also should learn how to respect the rights of non-Malays in the country by not questioning it.

During my stint as the state executive councilor for Selangor, Indian affairs was one of the portfolios that I was tasked to handle.

From my experience in handling Tamil schools in Selangor, I learnt that a large number of Indian professionals have emerged from these schools and are contributing immensely towards nation-building.

Many of them sit in the school's parent-teacher associations and donate as much as they can towards the overall improvement of their respective schools.

Some 60 percent of the Indian parents throughout Malaysia choose to enroll their children in Tamil schools because they have lost faith in the national school curriculum.

Tamil schools despite the lack of government assistance are able to produce straight A students consistently and sometimes even higher than national schools.

Besides Tamil schools unlike bumiputera-only institutions such as Mara and UiTM allows

all races to enroll in them, fostering national spirit and unity.

Why in this case Umno does not scrutinise the effectiveness of national schools in nurturing national unity instead?

Is it because it is something under their purview which has failed and that the Minister of Education Muhyiddin Yassin who is also Umno deputy president, is unable to answer the public?

When addressing the lack of English speaking talent within the high levels of civil service, I wonder as to why the federal government makes no effort to establish English-medium schools in particular areas such as rural locations to address that issue as well?

By establishing such schools, won't we will be able to give our children a brighter future and greater accessibility to the world?

It is only better if the ruling government sets out to provide more opportunities to our children instead of considering the removal of vernacular schools.

Oktoberfest attacked

Another issue which crept up recently was when PAS called on the authorities to immediately stop Carlsberg Malaysia's Oktoberfest beer festival as its large-scale promotions could challenge the sensitivities of the Muslim community.

Quoting PAS' Temerloh MP Nasrudin Hassan, the festival should be banned by all authorities - federal, state and local governments - as it is deemed to insult Muslims.

While Umno paper Utusan Malaysia also quoted Selangor Umno chief Noh Omar calling Selangor Menteri Besar Mohamed Azmin Ali to remove the billboard which publicised the festival immediately, as it appeared to have the consent of Muslims in the area to join the beer festival.

The fact is alcohol has never been a major problem for Muslims, and no organisation would dare invite or promote Muslims to consume alcohol at any time, not just at the Oktoberfest.

As such how can Muslims who profess their faith be attracted to such billboards and feel threatened by it?

As a Malaysian and a non-Muslim, all of us are taught to respect and consider the sensitivities of Malay and Muslim community.

However why is the sensitivities and affairs of non-Muslims often scrutinised and breached? Isn't it clear in the federal constitution as to the rights of non-Muslims as well?

PAS and Umno must also think on larger scale when I talk about sensitivities.

If they come up with the fact that they are by far the majority race and religion in the country, they should also consider that Non-Muslim bumiputera of Sabah and Sarawak also make up a large number of the population, and that their sensitivities and impression on the current happenings in the peninsular most certainly would affect them as well.

Perhaps then they would realise that the gap is not big after all.

With that in mind I hope that Umno and some of the PAS members could learn how to compromise and live harmoniously with other race and religions.

It is saddening to see both parties in trying to champion the party's cause, bring up matters that hinges of racial division.

In the time when there is a desperate call for moderation and compromise between all layers of the colourful Malaysian society, I hope that these parties send the correct message to Malaysians in the future.

'Double standards in Sedition Act arrests'

The recent haul of many Opposition leaders as part of the Sedition Act dragnet by the Federal government clearly show double-standard practices.

It is sad that not only my brethren in the Pakatan Rakyat coalition such as PKR's Bagan Serai MP N Surendran, Pandan MP and PKR vice president Rafizi Ramli, PAS' Shah Alam MP Khalid Abdul Samad, and DAP's Cheras MP Teresa Kok to name a few but Universiti Malaya law lecturer Azmi Sharom (left) as well, have been caught in it.

We all know that the Sedition Act by its content defined too broadly and is susceptible to abuse.

Worst still it is being used to criminalise almost any kind of democratic speech including legitimate criticisms against the federal government and authorities.

My question is why as I mentioned them earlier, Mohamad Azli and Syed Ali Al Habshee have not been arrested and investigated by the police for sedition ?

There is a clear cut precedent when former Umno MP for Kinabalu Mark Koding was convicted for sedition in 1982 after calling for Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools to be abolished in 1978.

Should the authorities not act upon this immediately?

In August, the racist academician Ridhuan Tee Abdullah in a column published by Sinar Harian warned that Selangor will be known as 'Selangor Darul Babi' if the-then Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim is removed from his position.

He made this comment over a proposed pig-farm project which was never approved.

However how can he insult the state of Selangor, its royal institution and the ruler with such an insinuation and get away with it?

Is it because of his often heavy and vitriolic criticisms against non-Muslims which favour the Umno-ruling government?

As many continue to plead for the law is be abolished, my point here is to not encourage more people to be hauled up under such an abysmal law but to ensure that while it is still enforced, that the government should be fair and just to its people instead of favouring those who support them instead.

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