

**Amir Muhammad: Never stop questioning
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Malaysians should have the gumption to start questioning so-called 'unquestionable' issues if they intend to go beyond the limitations imposed on public discourse, said prominent independent filmmaker Amir Muhammad.

He said that the country has a history of intellectual discourse that has been conveniently forgotten by the ruling government to stem dissent and the formation of independent ideas by the public.

Citing classic Malay films from the 1950s and 1960s, he said an intellectual discussion over the role of the nation's leadership had existed since then and only emphasised the need for the current generation to continue from where they left off.

NONEHe said that despite the popular depiction of leaders such as sultans as infallible examples of good character in films of the 1940s, it was the celluloid revolution of the following two decades that challenged the popular notion that leaders were of unquestionable morals.

"What we can do is re-evaluate (our positions)... things that 'cannot' be questioned have been questioned in the past without repercussion... so the current generation has the responsibility to probe these questions even further," Amir (left) said during a question-and-answer session at the 'Malays are muted too!' forum at the KL and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall last night.

The forum's panel included activist Hishamuddin Rais, cartoonist Zulkiflee Anwar Haque (better known as Zunar) and DJ Jamaluddin Ibrahim.

Feudalism still rampant

Amir pointed out that the culture of feudalism is still prominent among Malays, making it difficult for them to pose difficult questions to their so-called leaders.

malays muted too forum 060910 speakersThe unwavering support for the sultans of pre-independence, he said, had transferred to hero-worship of politicians after the nation declared independence from the British.

"Even after Merdeka, it is unfortunate that the practice has continued. Just look at the BN rhetoric... it is to teach people to be thankful," he said.

Amir however is optimistic that Malaysians are slowly starting to catch on to critical analysis, and this was shown clearly in the Reformasi movement of 1998 until the recent political upheaval where the ruling BN government lost its two-thirds majority in Parliament in the 12th general elections on March 8, 2008.

Question the leaders

Zunar stressed that it is every Malaysian's right to question their leadership, particularly if the government's decisions impugn on their rights and liberties.

He pointed out that as an artist, it is ridiculous for a minister or individual government agent

to decide that a piece of work is 'a threat to national security' when the public thinks otherwise.

NONEZunar (right) stressed that it is best left to an artist's followers to decide whether or not the work is either a 'threat' or something that can further intellectual discourse.

"If people want to revolt, they do not need to look at my book," he said, referring to his various publications banned by the Home Ministry.

Zunar noted that to truly liberate Malaysian thinking, the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) must be done away with.

"The PPPA is the twin brother of the ISA... it gives too much power to the minister and the politicians.

"I don't want people to come and bully me. This (art) is my right as a cartoonist, as a person and as a Malaysian," he said.

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