

Mak Yong: Kelantan ban smacks of discrimination
Malaysiakini.com
March 5, 2007
Lovely Jin

2007 is Visit Malaysia Year. Unfortunately, the PAS-led state government in Kelantan has twisted this definition to the maximum.

It was reported that the Kelantan state government has ruled that the traditional 'Mak Yong' dance can only be performed in private 'only for foreign tourists ... not for local residents or local Muslims'.

Why can't Malaysians be allowed to enjoy and - more importantly - learn to value and appreciate our native cultural arts that have been around for centuries? If Unesco can recognise Mak Yong as one of the oldest performing arts in the world, isn't it strange that the PAS government considers it as a threat to Malaysian society?

We also have to explore the terminology 'local resident'. While it is self-explanatory that it applies to Malaysian citizens, does the term 'local resident' also refer to diplomats, expatriates and migrant workers earning a living here? Then isn't it off-beat if their fellow countrymen who don't hold valid Malaysian working and dependent visas are permitted to view Mak Yong whilst the former are denied?

This year is 2007, and we're supposed to be celebrating 50 years of independence after being ruled under the chains of colonisation for 446 years. There was a time before our independence when entry into clubs like the Selangor Club was denied to Malaysians as the White administrators rendered it their privileged domain only.

PAS' move seems to revive the 'Whites Only' colour bar which existed then in Malaya, and brings to mind the segregation policy in 1950s America and apartheid South Africa, when there were separate laws for whites and coloureds.

Why does the PAS government provide this double standard treatment favouring foreign visitors? I thought Malaysia was already independent. This ban by PAS will only divide our country and brew unnecessary anger.

Firstly, it has already created two classes of people with preferential treatment for foreigners and discrimination against its own citizens. Barring locals from viewing a Mak Yong performance also suggests that the PAS government views its own Malaysian citizens as inferior to foreigners.

Secondly, does the PAS government not realise that its move may rankle the local crowd against foreigners when it is not the latter's fault that they are international tourists and show a keen desire in travelling to Malaysia to view our sights and arts?

Thirdly, it is even more ludicrous for Kelantan to say that it is willing to organise private shows for tourists. Why is the PAS government so eager to placate foreigners with our taxpayers money? Shouldn't our taxes be used to encourage domestic tourism and revive of our traditional arts scene?

Fourthly, as Malaysia attempts to move towards a classless society, conducting private performances on traditional and public arts will only stratify the distance between the haves

and the have-nots. This action by PAS serves to show that entertainment must be purchased.

Worse still, it sends the message that the PAS government must be bribed for individuals to be allowed to view cultural dances. Fifthly, PAS should seriously consider preserving our traditional theatre rather than killing it.

This letter is not targeted against international tourists who are most welcome to Malaysia anytime. Rather, this letter hopes to serve as an eye-opener against PAS bigoted laws.

Wake up, PAS. The days of racist segregation have been outlawed. Why set a precedent for bringing it back? There should be equal laws applicable to both Malaysians and foreigners.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/64087>