

In defence of women bloggers
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Political debates in Malaysia since 2004 seem to be not only characterised by widespread perception and allegations of corruption, misallocation of public resources and other forms of malpractices, but also bizarre utterances from politicians in high positions.

There was a former internal security minister who publicly called on "foreigners" who think the Malaysian police are cruel "to go back to their own countries".

Although it was not known whether by "foreigners", he meant non-Malaysian citizens who are in the country or non-Malay Malaysians, he was later transferred to another less sensitive ministry after his dismissal was publicly demanded by opposition leaders.

Then there was also the reported announcement made not too long ago by the information minister that all "Eurasian" or "Pan-Asian" faces are to be banned in advertisements and local TV shows as if all there are no Malaysian citizens and taxpayers with "Eurasian" or "Pan-Asian" features of the face.

Now, Tourism Minister Tengku Adnan Mansor has provoked even more furious reactions in the cyberspace for reportedly alleging that "all bloggers are liars" and "80 percent of the unemployed bloggers are women".

The minister's statements were reported not in any blog but by a leading mainstream newspaper in the country, namely the Sin Chew Daily on March 9.

According to the original report which was written in the Chinese language, Tengku Adnan made the statements after officiating a public function in response to a query on an allegation of red tapes in the government.

The minister was reacting to Nila Tanzil (right), an Indonesian journalist, who blogged about her experience of being given the runaround by Malaysian authorities. She was part of a 17-member Indonesian media delegation who was invited to cover Visit Malaysia Year.

Losing not just votes

The report also said that after sensing his audiences were obviously stunned by his statements, the minister light-heartedly and unapologetically responded by saying that he "might lose some women votes".

The protests and counterattacks were first launched by well-known and popular Malaysian female bloggers, the likes of Elizabeth Wong (below), Susan Loone, Nuraina A Samad and Marina Mahathir (left).

Certainly, the question of prejudice against women is raised in protest because when the minister said that "80 percent of the unemployed bloggers are women", he said it with contempt but the larger point that strikes at the ministerial claim is where he obtained the figure of 80 percent.

More crucially, what is wrong with unemployed women engaging in blogging even if the observation and figure are correct?

Moreover, how could a minister, whose portfolio is currently in charge of promoting the image of Malaysia internationally through the Visit Malaysia Year, publicly make the indiscriminate claim that "all bloggers are liars" without even limiting his target of attack to Malaysia?

Of course, even if he referred only to Malaysian bloggers, the claim that "all bloggers are liars" is outrageous.

The episode seems to suggest, first and foremost, that there is now a worrying trend among the ruling elites who feel that they can make wild claims and indiscriminate assertions publicly without facts and decent reasoning just because they are wealthy or powerful.

Expect more from them

As Tengku Adnan's reported reaction to his stunned audience, his only consideration is whether win or lose votes in elections which, after all, could be manipulated technically or psychologically when the time come.

Worse still, public functions seem to be fast becoming platforms for socially, politically and intellectually irresponsible top or senior decision-makers in the government to vent their frustration and anger, irrationally.

These are done without due considerations given to their on images and those of the government and country, factual or empirical truths as well as the feelings of their audiences and human targets of their outbursts.

Perhaps, the trend reflects not only the lack of credibility of the administration of the day but also of the quality intellectual infrastructure (schools, universities and mainstream media) as well as the societal system of moral values wherein these politicians have been 'produced'.

Seen in this light, Tengku Adnan's truly outrageous and wild assertions against bloggers will not be the last of the dot in the long line.

Do expect more such ministerial gaffes as long as the system continues to be unreformed or unchanged.

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