

**Hisham's non-apology apology**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Apr 30, 2008**  
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comment  
MCPX

We've all said and done things that we wish we could take back. Hishammuddin Hussein surely must rue the day he first raised that keris at the Umno general assembly in 2005.

He probably had no idea that the image of him waving that keris with a look of fierce determination would forever haunt him.

hishammuddin hussein with keris 050805A picture speaks a thousand words and this one was used to good effect by the opposition in the recent election. He was given the moniker 'Kerismuddin' by some and that issue was to dominate subsequent Umno general assemblies.

Once Hishammuddin had let the keris out of the bag, so to speak, there was no way of putting it back in. He simply could not fail to raise the keris at subsequent general assemblies because it would have been seen as a sign of weakness. He had gotten himself onto a one-way street with no U-turns.

While he himself did not pay a personal electoral cost for his actions some of the electoral fallout on the Barisan Nasional component parties could be attributed to the keris-waving incident.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107 unsheathAnd so we come to last week, when Hishammuddin apologised for his actions. Was it a non-apology apology? Some people think so, for good reasons.

Firstly, he said he was sorry 'if' he had offended the non-Malays. Is there any doubt that they were not just offended but outraged by it? Even party veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah attributed the keris-waving as one of the reasons why non-Malays were willing to vote PAS over Umno.

Secondly, in the same breath, he also apologised to the Malays for failing to defend the use of the keris as a Malay symbol. How does he expect anyone to interpret his apology as sincere when he takes back with one hand what he extends with the other? While we understand that this was a political move to defend his position within Umno, it would only provide fodder to those (such as ourselves) who question the sincerity of such an 'apology'.

He's a fake ultra

The sad thing about this incident is that we do not believe Hishammuddin to be a traditional Malay ultra. Like his deputy, Khairy Jamaluddin, he is what you'd call a fake ultra – someone who tries so hard to be an ultra for the sake of drumming up grassroots support.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107 kissingHis upbringing and demeanor certainly gives no indication of any deep ultra roots. His father, was third prime minister Hussein Onn, who probably had as many non-Malay friends as Malay ones. His grandfather, Onn Jaafar, famously tried (but failed) to open up Umno to non-Malays.

Furthermore, Hishammuddin's track record as the minister of education has not been a bad one, especially when it comes to giving financial assistance to Chinese and Tamil schools and making it easier for them to relocate. But with one movement of his arm, he undid much of the goodwill that would have come his way from the non-Malay community.

His apology has resulted in calls from within Umno for him to resign but for different reasons.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107 raisedAn Umno leader in Johor came out to say that the apology was not sufficient and that Hishammuddin should step down because his actions led to the historic electoral losses. This could have been a strategic ploy to weaken Hishammuddin and strengthen the hand of another Johor Umno leader who is poised to take on Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for the presidency of Umno.

Meanwhile, another Umno figure from Cheras has come out to call for Hishammuddin's resignation for giving into the demands of the non-Malays! This is probably more reflective of the general sentiment within Umno, especially in Umno Youth, but even if they feel this way, these days they would generally think twice before articulating it.

While Hishammuddin would like this matter to be put behind him, the whole issue of the keris (should it be raised again or not?) and the apology (was it insufficient or was it not even necessary?) will bound to emerge from time to time, and especially when the Umno general assembly draws near.

Hishammuddin has refused to say whether the keris will be raised again but we think that given the events of the past two months, it's highly unlikely that it will be raised - at least not in the same belligerent fashion as before. It might still make an appearance but in a non-threatening way.

Ol' Blue Eyes once sang: "Regrets, I've had a few, but then again too few to mention." Hishammuddin might not have too many regrets in his life but if he were to ever write an autobiography, the one regret that he would probably mention is his decision to raise the keris on that fateful day in 2005.

Let this be a lesson to others aspiring leaders within Umno.

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