

**Animal Kingdom**  
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So they came, thirty of them, from UMNO, PAS and even PKR, stood and sat outside the building where the Bar Council of Malaysia was about to commence its forum on 'Conversion to Islam'. This was enough reason for the protestors, these self-proclaimed defenders of Islam, to taunt those attending the forum with such tendentious racist chants as "MCPX babi" (pig), "balik China" (go back to China) and "pengkhianat" (traitors).

To protest is perfectly fine. It's a legitimate form of political expression. It's what Albert Hirschman called "voice".

conversion forum protest 090807 angry manAnybody who feels aggrieved by his or her government has the right to protest against it. Bombard it with his or her disgust. Malaysians should protest if they think their rights are being trampled. The thirty Malay protestors were had every right to protest.

But what gives these demonstrators the right to hurl racist slurs just to intimidate the forum's members? And why stop a forum that, equally, has every right to hold a meeting, discuss any topic under the sun, if Malaysia boasts it is a democracy?

We know what 'babi' means, in the context of Malaysia's history of multi-racialism, don't we? Clearly these protestors meant more than just 'pig'. Besides displaying their imbecility to the world, it was, to all intents, a deliberate and denigrating racial insult.

Insults are cheap. These protestors propelled their hatred at the forum's members for the latter daring to exercise their democratic right - the right promised by the ideal of Merdeka, proclaimed 51 years ago.

hindraf london demo 060208 templesIf it's alright for the regime to demolish Hindu temples, without regret or recompense, if it's alright for the racist regime to convert a non-Malay to Islam and then deny the same person the right to convert out of Islam, then it is alright for non-Malays to let the regime know that they are unhappy about the state of Denmark, and the stench it emits. That it is a vile and despicable regime, that the regime is littered with vile, despicable and corrupt men and women devoid of all morality, beneath contempt and beyond redemption.

But here's the problem. The Chinese also can hurl racist abuse at others. Malaysians always have done this. In my many travels through Malaysia over time, I've never understood why.

### **Hate vocabulary**

Every race in Malaysia has a vocabulary of ready-made racial slurs that are ugly. They always spell trouble. They divide a country; stop it from becoming a nation. Look at Fiji, Sudan, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Singapore. Yet the same people proclaim religion as their core.

conversion forum protest 090807 big crowdMy friend Christopher Hitchens is right: god is not great. Which Malaysian dares deny that a racist vocabulary does not live amongst them?

It's a vocabulary developed throughout history. In Malaysia this vocabulary certainly has intensified as racial differences heightened from 1948 and in the 1960s, culminating in the racial violence in 1969.

It is always lurking beneath the surface. It's written in the people's faces, laced in their whispers. Since then this vocabulary has sustained various levels of intensity. It's barely surprising that such deprecating language has been used yet again by these thirty so-called anti-Bar Council forum protestors.

It validates, yet again, that racism is alive, very alive, in Malaysia. What is peculiar about this protest, though, is that the defenders of law and order - the police, including the riot police, who were present at the protest - did nothing, absolutely nothing, to stop the protestors. Why?

Was this protest movement, if it can be called such, not an illegal assembly, without a police permit, in the same way the Abdullah Umno/BN regime had deemed Hindraf and other similar anti-Umno/BN regime demonstrations? Why weren't they chased and beaten up and detained under the anti-freedom Internal Security Act?

Answer: They are all Malays. They are all Muslims. And because these protestors had been, more than likely, endorsed by the regime. There's no other plausible explanation for the protestors to assemble, then send a posse to storm the forum - unhindered by the police.

conversion forum protest 090807 big posterIt was not a protest spawned by spontaneous combustion. Umno sycophants, blind as bats, are incapable of organising even a kindergarten raffle. Like the racist New Economic Policy, they need the state's crutches for succor. Moreover, from all reports, the police had arrived as early as the protestors did. So much, then, for the spontaneity or independence of the protestors.

Why were the thirty Umno henchmen supported by the Abdullah regime? Because, for the first time in a long time, they constituted a cross-membership of different Malay-Islamist groups. Among the protestors was one from Anwar Ibrahim's PKR. Abdullah's Islam Hadhiri just got buried by Islamic fundamentalism. It's back to the Dark Ages.

### **Who's boss ?**

The timing is interesting, too. An anti-regime movement that cuts across race, and perhaps class, appears to be gaining momentum in Malaysia. The wheels have been falling off the decrepit, incompetent and corrupt Abdullah regime. Abdullah is a weak man - too weak to govern.

Abdullah's incompetence irks the Umno Supreme Council. Certain members of the Supreme Council, distraught that Anwar Ibrahim is threatening to smash their political power and ill-gotten wealth, saw the thirty protestors as an opportunity to show the regime's critics who's boss - still.

student summits 020808 abdullah 1It's the Umno hierarchy which rustled up this loose coalition of Islamists. It explains why there were only thirty protestors and not 300 or 300,000 or three million.

The Abdullah regime is a racist one. This racism is borrowed, a carry-over, from Dr Mahathir Mohamad, ex-dictator and premier, who has been behaving as though he were king.

What's ugly is that Abdullah Badawi and Umno Inc. are latching on to strongly racist politics in an effort to divide-and-rule Malaysia in the same way that the British had in all their colonies.

The sinking-like-quicksand Abdullah regime is desperate to hang on to its thinning legitimacy, especially amongst a dwindling number of Malay-Muslim supporters now less willing to back Umno.

Like most political desperadoes, including Abdullah, Razak Najib, Umno and the Barisan Nasional need to galvanise greater support before being routed, again, at the next poll.

The only way it can do this is by engineering a scenario that the non-Malays, emboldened by the March election result, are now attempting to assault Islam. The Bar Council was painted as just that - anti-Malay, anti-regime and, worse, anti-Islam.

Who's the real 'pengkhianat' to Merdeka? Merdeka is meaningless in 'modern' Malaysia. A new colonialism has lived in the soul of the country - not yet a nation. It may never become a nation. In almost 51 years of so-called Merdeka, nothing has changed. Another 50 years and still real political change in Malaysia may never come.

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Even if Anwar Ibrahim wins power tomorrow, it's still unknown how he'll appeal to the non-Malay and Malay-Muslim voters with one voice. That voice cannot be above or beyond politics. It cannot be above and beyond race. It cannot be above and beyond religion.

There's nothing modern about Malaysian politics. It has always been ugly. It'll always be ugly. That's because the old race-class coalitions will still be the dominant social forces in Malaysia, and racist ideology is the only basis for legitimising any political party that is organised, fundamentally, around race and religion.

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