

# Don: Be careful in ethnic relations

## UPM course content described as judgmental



**Prof Khoo: 'Historical facts need to be easily verifiable'**

PETALING JAYA: Ethnic relations is a sensitive subject that needs to be handled with care, and universities should not rush to get their teaching materials and content out, said historian Prof Datuk Dr Khoo Kay Kim yesterday.

"Why do we always fall into the typical Malaysian pitfall of rushing into something, only to discover that the results are not up to expectations? Historical facts, for instance, need to be easily verifiable," he said, admonishing the Ethnic Relations module prepared by Universiti Putra Malaysia, which caused a furore over its

factual errors.

"Writers dealing with historical facts must be able to give the precise source of where they get their facts. If the source is vague, then their facts will be highly questionable."

The guide or notes for lecturers were reportedly prepared in haste for its first-year students to accommodate the Government's decision to introduce the subject this academic year, which started in early July at public universities.

According to a UPM academic, the teaching guide was compiled from archives and a collection of materials by several

authors to provide uniformity to the teaching of the course.

Prof Khoo described some of the contents as "rash" and "judgmental", particularly the blaming of the May 13 race riots on the DAP.

"It is a rash statement because there is no evidence of who started the riots. It is a complex issue that needs to be studied from all aspects. It is important for historians not to pass judgment and be able to deal with hard facts coldly," he added.

Prof Khoo, who is a member of the multi-racial team assigned to design the course,

said no textbook had been drafted and the module outlining the course would only be out next month.

He said the best way to relay the subject to students was to focus on culture instead of politics.

"We should not encourage young people to talk about politics, instead they should talk about culture," he said.

"There is no need to address the subject politically because politics engages conflict and deals with competition for power when the real issue is the lack of understanding between the different races

among the younger generation. They need to understand the differences between races and what makes each one special."

For Academic Movement president Associate Professor Dr Wan Abdul Manan Wan Muda, it could be a case of too little too late to introduce the subject of ethnic relations to students in university.

"Ethnic sensitivities, understanding and harmony need to be fostered from a young age," he said.