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on Jakim. The fear in Malaysia is palpable. One student told me that he wanted to ask about ketuanan Melayu, but was afraid.

No mention of the ‘J word’

Free from the confines of Malaysia, why did the Malaysians, in London not mention the ‘J word’? The talk was disappointing too, because Mahathir’s conversation with Wan Saiful Wan Jan, the chairperson of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas), did not materialise. Wan Saiful was relegated to introducing Mahathir. This was not what we came for!

There is one more reason for feeling short-changed. We only had just over an hour with him, instead of the two-hour session which was advertised. The opportunity for him to hear our concerns and hopes was wasted.

‘He was speaking hot air’

One member of the audience said, “Mahathir’s droning voice was like a cobra hypnotising its prey. Whilst he was speaking, I felt reassured. This was short-lived; as soon as the talk was over, I realised he was speaking hot air.”

I don’t know about the rest, but I left very disappointed. If Mahathir is leading the charge against the current regime in Malaysia, he created the impression that Bersatu lacked a cohesive strategy. We don’t want another party, which apart from wanting to oust Najib Abdul Razak, is virtually a clone of Umno Baru. We don’t want a new party, ‘Umno-Bersatu-Baru’.

Many people wanted to ask questions. The event was probably just warming up. Perhaps the deputy dean knew that controversial questions would be in the next phase, so he ended the session early. We were furious. The decision to cut the session short was foolish. Many questions remain unanswered. The Malaysians who were hungry to share Mahathir's vision on the ‘new’ beginning felt let down. Again! Had I been given the chance to ask a question, mine would have been about Jakim.

Question: “There is one Malaysian department which has a vice-like grip on us. It affects everyone, Malay, and non-Muslim, married or single, dead or alive. Malay women are especially affected.

“That department is Jakim. With its RM1 billion annual budget, its focus appears to be on halal trolleys and the dress code. It uses the religious police to spy on unmarried couples. It fails to address more pressing issues like corruption, even the alleged corruption in mosques. If Malaysia is to move forward, would you agree that Jakim should be shut down? If not, why not?” Sadly, the architect of Jakim did not have a chance to answer.

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