

NST admits and regrets 'anti-Islam' report against Oz Senator
The Malaysian Insider
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 — The New Straits Times (NST) has admitted to falsely reporting that Australian Senator Nicholas Xenophon had criticised Islam in 2009, saying today it regrets the mistake and will take steps to make amends.

In a three-paragraph statement to The Malaysian Insider, the Umno-owned daily said that Xenophon, a known associate of Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, had not called Islam a "criminal organisation" as reported in its article yesterday but had instead used the label to criticise "Scientology".

The remarks issued by Xenophon were purportedly made during the latter's adjournment speech in Australia's Parliament in 2009.

NST also pledged to publish an "appropriate statement" on the issue in both its print and online editions, adding its regret to any distress the incident may have caused the independent Australian Senator.

The NST's response, in verbatim, is as follows:

"We refer to the news regarding Mr Nicholas Xenophon's complaint in respect of the article entitled 'Observer Under Scrutiny' with a sub-title 'Impartiality Questioned: Anti-Islam Australian Lawmaker Comes Under Fire', which appeared in the May 2, 2012 edition of the New Straits Times published by us.

"We regret that the article attributes certain statements to Xenophon, particularly the use of the word 'Islam' which he did not make in a parliamentary speech in November 2009. We are taking steps to make amends including publishing an appropriate statement in our newspaper and its online version to address the issue.

"We truly and sincerely regret that Xenophon has suffered any distress and embarrassment arising from the article and we honestly believe that that steps we are taking to make amends will resolve the matter."

Earlier today, NST head Abdul Jalil Hamid confirmed that the paper was investigating claims that it had misreported Xenophon's three-year-old speech, which had effectively painted the Senator as anti-Islam.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) today, the independent senator is fuming from the "extraordinary attack" against his impartiality and is contemplating legal action against the NST, which had carried the article yesterday.

Xenophon also told the Australian newspaper that NST's alleged use of the word "Islam" to replace the actual term "Scientology", which he had criticised in his 2009 speech, was "an example of the kind of dirty tricks the ruling party employs and had used against the

Opposition Leader Anwar”.

The NST has since removed the article from its website, but cached copies can still be found of the offending story.

In the NST article, Xenophon was not only accused of insulting Islam during his 2009 adjournment speech in Australia’s Parliament, but was also said to have expressed strong support for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community.

The NST’s extract of the speech quoted the senator as saying: “What we are seeing is a worldwide pattern of abuse and criminality. On the body of evidence, this is not happening by accident; it is happening by design. Islam is not a religious organisation. It is a criminal organisation that hides behind its so-called religious beliefs.”

But in the excerpt from the Australian Parliament’s Hansard, cited in the SMH, Xenophon had actually said: “What we are seeing is a worldwide pattern of abuse and criminality. On the body of evidence, this is not happening by accident; it is happening by design. Scientology is not a religious organisation. It is a criminal organisation that hides behind its so-called religious beliefs.”

A cached version of the article can be accessed here:

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:XMnViJII4rEJ:www.nst.com.my/nation/general/observer-under-scrutiny-1.79786+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=my>

According to the NST, Xenophon had also appeared to express support for same-sex marriages in the same adjournment speech, purportedly claiming that other lawmakers agreed with him and such unions would eventually be allowed by law.

The paper quoted PKR-turned-independent MP Datuk Seri Zahrain Mohamed Hashim as criticising Xenophon for his words, saying that the latter was not only outspoken against Islam but also supportive of the LGBTs.

“Should we let someone like Xenophon influence our culture and moral values through politics? By confiding in Xenophon, is Anwar also supporting the LGBT movement?” he asked, according to the NST.

SMH, however, did not dispute the NST’s report over Xenophon’s alleged support for homosexuality.

But the paper claimed that the NST had refused to comment on the issue last night.

Xenophon was among the team of international observers or the “pre-election assessment team” invited into Kuala Lumpur by Anwar to look into the country’s electoral reform attempts.

The team was on a six-day mission from April 25 and was tasked to interview local government and political leaders, before compiling its recommendations on how Malaysia could have a clean and fair polls process, which the country’s opposition leaders have insisted does not exist here.

They had also observed last Saturday’s rally for free and fair elections by Bersih and in an immediate response to the event, Xenophon had insisted that the rally-goers were well-behaved and even festive, instead of unruly as claimed by government leaders.

As a result, Xenophon has come under fire for his allegedly blinkered support for Anwar, with questions raised over his independence and impartiality.

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