

**If you don't like statistical facts, don't be policymakers,
analysts tell Putrajaya
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BY ANISAH SHUKRY**

The Education Ministry's directive to the Universiti Malaya's Centre for Democracy and Elections (UMcedel) director to resign over his research findings shows Putrajaya's lack of maturity, confidence and insincerity in facing critical facts, political analysts said.

Ibrahim Suffian, director of independent pollster Merdeka Center, said the government seemed unable to accept that varied opinions among the public were indicators of a mature democracy.

"It shows insecurity, lack of maturity on their part. I don't know exactly what transpired and on what grounds they requested him to resign," Ibrahim told The Malaysian Insider.

"But there is the sense that they can't take criticism, even from academics. Professor Dr Mohamad Redzuan Othman is a learned, prominent individual who has made great contributions in research."

The Malaysian Insider reported yesterday that Redzuan, a prominent political scientist, was not only ordered to leave as director of UMcedel, but his tenure as dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the university was also not renewed.

This was allegedly due to Redzuan's work at UMcedel, which has irked Putrajaya over the years with its various survey findings on Malaysian politics which had shown the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) in a bad light.

But Ibrahim confirmed that UMcedel's studies were free from bias and said that its findings were similar to Merdeka Center's own surveys.

"From what I have viewed over recent years, there are differences between the way UMcedel draws its samples compared with Merdeka Centre.

"But for the most part, we have confirmed that from their surveys which are similar to ours, the findings are not really far off," said Ibrahim.

He said Putrajaya's continued pressure against academics and public institutions of higher learning did not bode well for the future of Malaysia's education.

"It sends the wrong signal to students and faculty members. It shows that you are safer cosying up to the people in power rather than speaking the truth."

He added that if the government kept this up, it would jeopardise the quality of Malaysia's scholars and its universities' standings.

"It just points out that at the end of the day, those in power are mostly interested in keeping power, rather than hearing the truth."

Wan Saiful Wan Jan, chief executive officer (CEO) of think-tank Institute for Democracy and Academic Affairs (IDEAS), concurred.

"I wouldn't say Professor Dr Mohamad Redzuan Othman's work was either pro-opposition or pro-government. I think he was simply reporting the facts," he told The Malaysian Insider.

“And when people don’t like the statistical facts presented to them, then I’m afraid those people should not be policymakers.”

One survey which was said to have rattled the BN was conducted during the run-up to the 2013 general election, where its findings showed that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak trailed behind opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Najib had rubbished the findings and many BN supporters questioned the methodology used.

Wan Saiful said it was common for politicians unhappy with research findings to blame the methodology, no matter how scientific and clear it was.

“When it comes to research and methodology, I would take the word of a university professor rather than a politician.

“If these politicians are so good at methodology, then they should open up their own research firms rather than be politicians.”

Wan Saiful added that the Education Ministry’s secretary-general and chief secretaries must immediately hunt down “the little napoleons” responsible for Redzuan’s removal and sack them.

“If politicians are behind it, then we must remember this when we vote in the next general election,” he said.

“If it comes from the Education Ministry, then it shows what a joke

the ministry is, after having talked about reforming higher education and all.”

When asked if it was common for governments around the world to remove academics with opposing views, Wan Saiful said: “Trying to compare Malaysia with the global trend is a futile exercise.

“Where the rest of the world is moving to autonomy, decentralisation of power, Malaysia is still using the Soviet style for higher education. The government controls everything.”

He said the only way to move forward was for the government to decentralise control of institutions of higher learning.

“The government has to step back and admit they must not control from the centre if they want to improve.

“Give it another 10 years and you will find private universities going really beyond and better public universities. Because they have the autonomy to do what they would like to do,” said Wan Saiful.

Dr Arnold Puyok, an academic with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, agreed that political interference was handicapping Malaysia’s public institutions of higher learning.

“I hope to see that the university be allowed to operate on its own, be given more autonomy and intellectual freedom must be allowed to flourish. We should not have any politicians interfering in students’ and lecturers’ affairs.

“We have seen and we have read reports where some politicians have

had influence over the university and some students are also afraid to speak up critically and constructively because of certain restriction.”

He said that it was quite common for analysts like himself and Redzuan to receive complaints from BN and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) politicians over their work, especially if it was critical towards them.

Puyok said he had seen Redzuan’s work, and found it to be neutral, although critical of the government.

“But I think that’s the job of an academic, we must be allowed to do research independently, freely and to share findings with the public.

“If anyone is not happy, perhaps what they can do is engage with the academic.”

He urged fellow academics not to succumb to political pressure and continue carrying out their duties.

“We have to continue doing what we are asked to do – continue our research, sharing knowledge with our students and society, teaching.

“No matter how difficult it is for the government to accept our findings, if it’s good for the country and government, they should accept it.

“But of course we have to be responsible with our facts and research. Speak the truth, but let our work be governed by ethics,” said Puyok.
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