

NST boss says probing 'anti-Islam' report against Aussie senator
The Malaysian Insider
May 03, 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 — The New Straits Times (NST) is investigating allegations that its journalist had misreported a three-year-old speech by Australian Senator Nicholas Xenophon, effectively painting him as anti-Islam, the paper's chief editor Abdul Jalil Hamid confirmed today.

When contacted, Abdul Jalil told The Malaysian Insider that he would not comment further on the matter, merely saying that "we are looking into the facts".

He said he would be in contact as soon as a statement regarding the incident was ready.

The Umno-controlled NST has been accused of fabricating words uttered by Xenophon (picture), a known associate of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, during an adjournment speech in the Australian Parliament in 2009.

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 told the Australian newspaper that the 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 of the report can still be found.

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](#).

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.

"I also challenge PAS's ulama to question Anwar on why he sought Xenophon as a confidante, as clearly Xenophon stands against Islamic values."

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 in the team of international observers or the "pre-election assessment team" invited to 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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