

Aussie senator to sue NST, calls anti-Islam report 'sickening'
The Malaysian Insider
May 04, 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 4 — Australian Senator Nicholas Xenophon has confirmed he will sue the New Straits Times (NST), accusing the Umno-controlled Malaysian daily of jeopardising his safety by publishing an article portraying him as anti-Islam.

The independent lawmaker said he was aware of the newspaper's decision to retract its report but said he would still seek legal redress in either or both Australia and Malaysia.

"I will be conferring with both Malaysian and Australian lawyers on this.

"This is a very serious defamation and it is distressing.

"My views on Islam were completely fabrication... I am sickened," he said in a phone call to The Malaysian Insider yesterday.

The NST had yesterday admitted to having falsely quoted Xenophon (picture) in its article on Wednesday as calling Islam a "criminal organisation" during his 2009 speech in Australia's Parliament.

But according to Hansard, the senator, a known associate of Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, had instead used the label to criticise "Scientology".

"Of course this has become a danger to me. I have been accused of something incredibly serious... of disparaging Islam in the most disgusting way.

"I have already been advised that my safety is now in danger," he said.

Xenophon pointed out that although NST had pulled its article from its website, it had already likely been read by thousands of netizens.

He stressed that he was in no way against Islam and instead has great respect for the religion.

"How could they do this?" he asked. "I have tremendous respect for the people of Malaysia... Malaysians are my friends."

He added that he had been in Malaysia as a part of the opposition-commissioned international team of observers during the Bersih 3.0 weekend, not merely on invitation but due to his "passion" for the country and its people.

"So this is something I must do, something I need. I need a court ruling on what had occurred," he said, referring to his decision to proceed with the legal suit.

When asked, however, if he would seek out the Malaysian government to mete punitive action against the NST, Xenophon said he would first consult his lawyers.

But he said the fact that the prominent English daily is Umno-owned "adds seriousness to the case".

"I cannot fathom how they would stoop this low," he said.

In its response to the incident yesterday, the NST had also pledged to publish an "appropriate statement" on the issue both in its print and online versions, 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."

According to the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) yesterday, Xenophon had said 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](#).

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.

Xenophon was among a team of international observers or “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.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/aussie-senator-to-sue-nst-call-s-anti-islam-report-sickening/>