

EDMUND BON

Human rights advocate, chairperson of Constitutional Law Committee of the Malaysian Bar Council

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PORTRAIT: SHAWN LOR / BLINK STUDIO

If you were a young lawyer in Malaysia, here's how not to put your career in jeopardy: 1) Do not defend alleged Islamic extremists for free; and 2) do not question the authority on human rights issues. But if you believe in truth and justice, Edmund Bon has a message for you: "Cliched as it sounds, lawyers are supposed to uphold justice without fear or favour."

And Edmund walks the talk. He has defended alleged Jemaah Islamiya (JI) and the Malaysian Mujahideen Group (KMM) members detained under Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA). He has also been arrested in 2007 for preventing local authorities from removing banners championing human rights from the Bar Council premises during International Human Rights Day. As chairperson of the Bar Council's Human Rights Committee, he is currently serving his second term and believes in fighting the good cause, even when it hurts for him to do so. "Too often, lawyers are blinded by fear or the pursuit of monetary gains that we forget our calling," he says.

Called to London's prestigious Lincoln's Inn, 36-year-old Edmund is also counsel for high profile cases such as the Perak constitutional crises, as well as Anwar Ibrahim's second sodomy trial. "We lost many times in court due to the thorny nature of the cases we affiliate with, but the adrenaline of possibly setting precedents and making a change keeps me going," he explains.

Determined to bring more power to the people, Edmund has been ruffling more feathers lately with what he calls a "blawg" (law blog) in LoyarBurok. He says the online resource aims to empower Malaysians by enlightening them on the country's complex legal system, and serve as platform for activists to express their views and inspire others to do the same. "I hope the blawg creates awareness that will eventually stem the tide of cronyism, nepotism and authoritarianism," he says. **M**

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