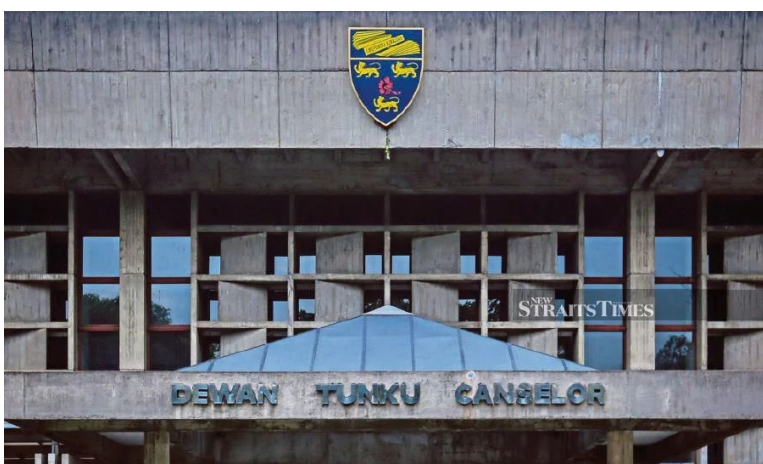


Youngest UM director's suggestions a search for truth, justice



By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - January 18, 2022 @ 12:00am



Danesh Raj Nagarajan may well be a source of inspiration to bring back the noble academic tradition. - NSTP file pic

When Danesh Raj Nagarajan, 26, was appointed as a member to the Universiti Malaya (UM) board last year, he was accused of being a political appointee, which he denied.

He said it was more because of his active involvement with the university during his student days. And this was evidently so, although many are still not convinced.

After all, he is the youngest to be elected to the board, which normally consists of elderly public and corporate figures with considerable experience and stature. Danesh is an outlier in this regard.

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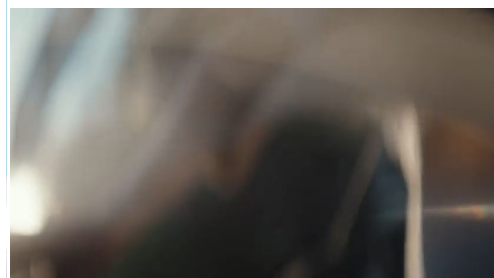
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Even then appointees have been marred by controversy because some were deemed to be misfits in an academic environment and culture.

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The alleged unspoken rule is that they must be partial to the management and establishment.

In addition, a deeper understanding of institutional autonomy and educational governance is foreign to the terms of reference of the board, unlike that of the council (*majlis*) it replaced when universities were purportedly corporatised some decades ago.

It's worth mentioning that UM once had a political opposition leader as council chairman whose council suggested Royal Professor Ungku Abdul Aziz Ungku Abdul Hamid as vice-chancellor for 20 years (1968 to 1988).

It only goes to show that institutional autonomy used to be a constructive part of our educational tradition, just like most universities worldwide worthy of their names and stature.

To this end, Danesh may well be a source of inspiration to bring back the noble academic tradition.

This optimism is born out of the *Cadangan 100 Hari Sebagai Ahli Lembaga Pengarah Universiti Malaya* that he issued at the end of his 100 days as a board member last week.

Not only is this the first of its kind coming from a university board member, it also comes from its youngest member.

This reiterates the point that the younger generation can offer something new when it comes to meeting expectations as the leaders of tomorrow.

The points raised were different in that they are mostly people-centric and not limited to UM: unemployment among graduates and youth, student parliamentary programmes and representation on the student disciplinary panel.

Of particular interest is the second point (student parliamentary programmes), mooted way back at USM, as a platform for universities to

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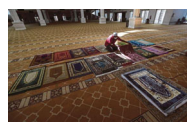
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In other words, it is more of a search for truth and justice, which is the raison d'être of higher education.

This is practically absent in most local universities, and UM is no different.

This notion is supported by the other suggestions, which are directed mostly at UM.

They include creating a future that will guarantee and enhance a democratic system among students and student leaders.

It's interesting to see how these will be taken up and translated by the UM board under the new chairman, who was appointed recently.

More so when they represent the views of students seldom accommodated in university governance.

The list is refreshing as it does not feature the regular issues of ranking and league tables that many local universities are preoccupied with.

The suggestions reflect matters more important to student and alumni quality of life, as seen when many activities didn't happen during the pandemic.

Could this be an indication of the new norm for Malaysian universities post-pandemic?

After all, the coronavirus does not care about a university's ranking.

Meaning to say, what is more important is the state of the university as defined by issues gathered by Danesh.

Will this finally overcome people's obsession with imaginary reputation compared with the reality on the ground?

His pledge to play the role of checks and balances without compromise is now taken seriously as he quoted the Quran (8:27, translated by Yusuf Ali):

"O ye that believe! Betray not the trust of Allah and the Messenger, nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you."

Kudos, we wish you well.

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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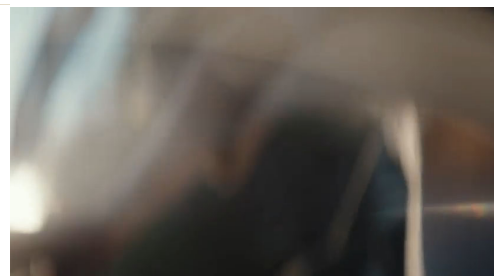


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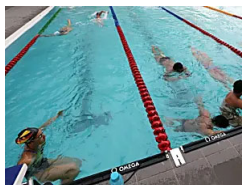
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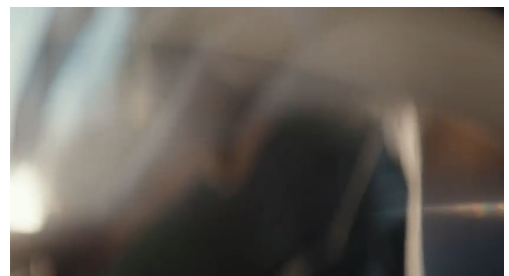


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