

**Ragging,  
a nagging  
issue now**

**I**T MAY have been an accepted practice in the past, but ragging is no longer tolerated these days.

However the issue which hasn't sparked any controversy in recent years, suddenly came alive after a recent incident, and may trigger great interest especially with most public universities beginning their new semesters next week.

A student of the Royal Military College (RMC) died two weeks after being ragged and it has heightened the urgency to quell the problem.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin was quick to issue a stern warning to university and college heads that they would be held accountable for ragging at their premises.

As orientation week approaches, he said seniors can "orientate" freshies, but the authorities must be vigilant to ensure that there are no untoward incidents.

"Based on what happened recently at the RMC, we will not tolerate any kind of ragging and we hope it won't happen during orientation week. It must not. University authorities must be accountable and ensure that ragging does not happen," Mohamed Khaled said.

He said the purpose of varsity orientations were merely to familiarise freshmen with their new environment and not subject them to ragging.

"Everyone needs to be mindful about this," he said.

## Orientation week

The warning comes several days before orientation week starts on July 4 in all public universities.

Over 40,000 students are expected to start their undergraduate course in 20 public universities this year, which is 0.38% more compared with last year's admissions.

In response to the minister's warning, university heads stood together in declaring that ragging will not be tolerated and urged freshies who were bullied to come forward and file their complaints immediately.

They noted that although ragging was not a new phenomenon, it should not take place at universities.

The campus authorities reminded all parties that the formal orientation week was already in place at all universities and there were guidelines that everyone must adhere to.

The vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors contacted by *StarEducation* reiterated that ragging was unlawful and would not be tolerated.

They advised freshmen who were ragged to complain immediately to campus authorities such as the college masters, fellows or even the security offices.

Universiti Putra Malaysia vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Nik Mustapha R. Abdullah said that while ragging was almost non-existent these days, stern action would be taken against those who attempt to create trouble.

"We will definitely take action if it happens. If the offence is serious, there is a possibility the action may warrant expulsion," he said when contacted.

"The seniors should know that ragging is

against the law.

"Orientation week is conducted every year to welcome new students. The universities set guidelines and students have to respect that," he added.

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Sahol Hamid Abu Bakar warned that students could be expelled if they were caught ragging others on campus while Universiti Utara Malaysia vice-chancellor Prof Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak said there was no harm in senior students getting to know their juniors, but added that they should know when to draw the line.

"Harmless jokes are fine, but anything involving physical, mental or verbal abuse and humiliation will not be tolerated.

"Schoolchildren may be ignorant, and think bullying is fun, but at universities, we are all adults and I don't think ragging, if any, would come to that level," he said, in reference to the RMC incident.

Prof Mohamed said there were notices circulated to serve as a reminder to students on the consequences of ragging.

"Security officers, as well as fellows from residential colleges would be vigilant during the early weeks of the semester to prevent ragging from taking place."

## Facilitators to oversee

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) deputy vice-chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Prof Datuk Dr Mohamad Abdul Razak said over 500 selected student facilitators were trained for orientation week and were asked to look out for any untoward happenings. Students leaders too joined in the fray against ragging.

Chan Kheng Fai, 21, a third-year law undergraduate from Universiti Malaya (UM) said that complaints of ragging were unheard of as it was no longer a common practice in universities.

A representative from the student council, Chan said that the Student Affairs Department had set strict ground rules on the do's and don'ts during orientation week.

He added that student facilitators had undergone training to learn about proper procedures when conducting activities.

"Fresh undergraduates can always talk to us if they face any problems," he added.

Goh Seong Ling, 21, a third-year undergraduate from UM said that ragging was unacceptable behaviour. The dentistry student did not think there was a need for hierarchy between the junior and senior students, saying instead that there should be mutual respect between the "freshies" and their "seniors".

Through his experience, he said the senior students played an important role in guiding the junior students as they progressed in their studies.

However, UM final-year undergraduate Muhd Azham Aizad Hamdan, 22, believed that light ragging was necessary for the juniors as sometimes it was a reality check and a humbling experience. He believed that it was such experiences at a boarding school that brought him "down to earth" and made him a better person.

"Light ragging such as making juniors obey the orders of seniors is something I am open to. However, any physical form of ragging which involves punching and kicking is definitely unacceptable," he added.