

Headline **Protests set to mar pope's state visit to UK**
Date **13 Sep 2010**
MediaTitle **New Straits Times**
Section **World**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **136,530 / 330,000**

Language **English**
Page No **23**
Article Size **191 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **2,645**
PRValue **7,934**



Protests set to mar pope's state visit to UK

LONDON: A coalition of protest groups will come together to demonstrate against Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Britain, with a march through here uniting those opposed to the historic trip.

While child abuse by Catholic priests in a number of countries has sparked worldwide coverage, the protests in Britain will encompass a wider range of issues.

Abuse victims, secularists, pro-abortion groups, atheists, humanists, demonstrators calling for women priests and protesters angry at the cost of the visit are joining forces, culminating with a "Protest the Pope" rally.

Organisers insist they will not disrupt events during the four-day trip starting on Thursday, the first ever state visit to Britain by a pope.

Nonetheless, their campaign threatens to take the shine off what promises to be a landmark for Catholicism in Britain.

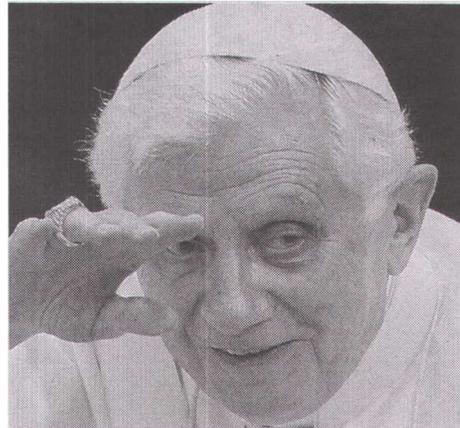
In a bid to calm the waters, the Archbishop of Southwark, Peter Smith, met representatives of the demonstrators, including high-profile rights protester Peter Tatchell.

"Benedict is totally out of step with modern, liberal British values. People reject his reactionary stance against women priests, gay equality and condom use to prevent the spread of HIV.

"We don't believe that a pope with such anti-humanitarian views should be honoured with a state visit. We also object that part of these visits are being funded by the taxpayer at a time of austerity," he said.

The "Protest the Pope" march is to take place here on Saturday, starting from Hyde Park — just hours before the pope is due to hold a prayer vigil there — and head to the prime minister's Downing Street residence.

Catholic Voices said external critics of the



A poll shows two-thirds of respondents were indifferent to Pope Benedict XVI's visit

contemporary church proffered some misguided views.

"We've had 25 years of AIDS in Africa and the virus has continued to spread despite widespread condom use," said coordinator Austen Ivereigh.

"A technocratic, condoms-based solution to AIDS, as if this alone can solve AIDS, is just simply not true," he said, claiming that the church cared for at least a third of AIDS sufferers.

Despite their disagreements, demonstrators and organisers alike face the same problem: conquering public indifference.

A poll for public theology think tank Theos this month dovetailed with an Ipsos Mori survey which found that two-thirds of respondents were indifferent to the pope's visit. — AFP