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# Angels and Demons

THE English Premier League kicks off tomorrow.

For many, it's a joyous start to an annual dose of scintillating drama that only the toughest and, arguably, the most loyally-followed league in the world, guarantees.

For the many Muslim fans, the matches would be a good way to unwind — or just the opposite — after a long day of fasting.

My team, Manchester United, will be back, promising yet another intriguing season. Non-believers will again look forward to seeing the Red Devils falter.

It would be interesting to see how ageing Chelsea will fare as well as free-spending Manchester City and struggling Liverpool.

Sports is just a lovely thing, and for that, politics should stay out.

It was only last month that a proclamation made the headlines for the wrong reasons. *The Malay Mail*, on July 22, ran a reaction story on criticism by two religious scholars on Muslim football fans wearing emblems that could "erode" their faith, such as the Christian crucifix, representation of the devil and a beer company logo.

Many were left shaking their heads in unison of disbelief when the "devil" emblem of the Manchester United Football Club was slapped with a devil-worship tag.

The scholars had also said Muslims should not wear the jerseys of Brazil, Portugal, Barcelona, Serbia and Norway for carrying images of the cross on their emblems.

The issue has since died off in the media, but on the street, people still talk about it. No one's disputing the "edict"; it was mostly the focus on issuing "pronouncements" on matters, the more liberal-minded population would label as "trivial", that was of concern.

I must qualify that by "trivial", I am not saying they should be rubbished, for there is no such thing when it comes to religion.

Baffling, however, was why the scholars focused on such an arguably "light" subject when there were many "major" issues needed to be tackled.

They should take a leaf off Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom who recently urged Muslim clerics

to play a bigger role in removing the stigma on AIDS patients. As an influential group, he had said the clerics should join others in helping society control and prevent the HIV/AIDS menace.

"AIDS patients are deemed bad from the moral and social aspect. As such, explanation, understanding and religious approach can remove the stigma and discrimination."

Right on, sir. Now, that is what you call real focus.

As a Muslim, it pains me that Islam had, on occasions, been confused as stifling. Inevitably, in some cases, you get unfair stereotyping, and even worse, Islam-bashing. Pardon me, but it is when energy is wasted on "trivial" matters that we arrive at such a scenario.

Politics, at times, does nothing to help. Remember the oath allegedly taken by some Pas members that their wives were automatically divorced if they stopped being party members? I could not believe it when some friendly parties to Pas even supported this. It was even once defended as the party members' right.

Religions, and certainly Islam, are not rigid. What is lacking are the efforts to explain why certain things are the way they are.

For example, the issue of polygamy. Islam allows it as it promotes the protection of women, and not the opposite, contrary to common belief.

Before the women's rights people get all riled up, the spirit behind it was to ensure as many women as possible had the chance to have a family, be protected by a husband and have the rights to many things a Muslim wife is entitled to, like inheritance.

It allows polygamy to deter fornication; temptations of having extramarital affairs and the ruining of marriages as an institution; social ills like teen pregnancies; and other negatives.

If one was to take on an affair or a mistress, what happens to her and her children, should it go that far, after the man dies? So goes the simple rationale, I was told by many an *ustaz*.

But before you use this as an excuse, also consider what these

*ustaz* had also said: Islam says only when you can be fair, like the Prophet was, can you take on many wives. It puts such a huge responsibility on the husband if he decides to take more than one wife.

"Can you be fair, like the Prophet was? That's a difficult task and, as such, one should not dream of marrying another, for in the afterlife, all your deeds as well as every single penny you accumulate, would be questioned of you," I remember the late *Ustaz Yusoff*, my

MCKK *cikgu agama*, saying.

I am not promoting polygamy, but the understanding that goes behind the "edict" has, at least in my mind, never been properly explained. What we get are accusations of lust and such, without the efforts to learn and create awareness of the conditions one must comply with to take another wife.

"It is just so the case, so live with it", seems to be the "best" explanation one gets these days.

Criticising without first learning about what you criticise is grossly unfair. Firstly, understand that no religion is bad. If it is one's personal choice to not carry out certain things set by a religion, it is really an issue between that person and the Almighty.

That said, there's no reason to lambast religion as backwards and regressive when history proved that when the tenets of religions were deeply observed, many kingdoms of past had thrived.

Creating awareness, just like what *Jamil* is asking for HIV sufferers, allays suspicions, and promotes humility and all things good.

If one practises the tenets of any religion, then it is good. If a person is lax, then it is the practitioner's fault, not the religion. It will always be an issue of personal choices.

It also baffles me to read that a Muslim woman who wants to wear a burqa in an Australian court would have to remove it. She wanted to wear it when appearing as a witness for the prosecution in a fraud trial. The defence team raised concerns on how the jury was expected to read her expressions if they could not see her face.

While the judge will make a decision on Aug 19, the question that

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begs to be asked is this: will her testimony as a WITNESS be less or more reliable if she removes the burqa? For me, it smacks of discrimination. It is her personal choice that has to be respected.

It is high time people respect other people's choices and not turn religion into a circus. Some quarters should not make too much fuss if Muslims want to wear the *tudung*, as should Muslims respect the beliefs of others, like the Sikhs wearing the turban, for example.

Some argued that headscarves could hinder a woman's progress in life to the point where her movements would be suppressed when taking part in sports.

I leave you this picture of the Iranian rugby team in the recent World Cup for you to decide on what the truth is.

In the meantime, have a lovely Ramadan. I know I will, and along with it, the flowing football of the Red Devils.

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