

Headline **Let's fight to keep Malaysia moderate**
Date **07 Aug 2011**
MediaTitle **Sunday Star**
Section **Focus**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Weekly**
Circ / Read **320,964 / 1,072,000**

Language **English**
Page No **17**
Article Size **381 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **14,258**
PRValue **42,774**



Let's fight to keep Malaysia moderate

We must strive to be progressive enough to appreciate that it is good to learn the religions of fellow Malaysians.



It is unprecedented. The operation by the Selangor state religious department (Jais) on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church on Wednesday is shameful and a blot on our history.

The church has claimed that they were having a goodwill dinner with a non-governmental organisation while the state exco member in charge of religious affairs, Datuk Hasan Ali, has backed Jais, claiming that they had evidence of proselytisation among Muslims.

His statement came just hours after his boss, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim, had expressed regret and asked for a report from Jais.

Instead of passing the buck and being defensive, Khalid asked for a dialogue and admitted that Jais came under the state government and that they reported to the Selangor Islamic Council headed by PAS' Hasan.

The operation was conducted by Jais, with police personnel present, after it purportedly received complaints that Muslims were present at the event.

We can expect the church and the Muslims present to maintain that there was no attempt to convert anyone while Jais would stick to its stand to justify its intrusion into the church.

Although the manner of the intrusion is not clear, the fact remains that Jais officials entered the premises without a search warrant. Furthermore, any place of worship is holy ground and such lack of respect and sensitivity does not augur well for the nation. It smacks of over-zealousness.

The Jais officials could have exercised restraint by waiting for the function to be over and then politely informing the church pastor of the complaint and the need for them to interview the Muslim guests present. No one, I believe, was going to run away.

We need to be more open-minded. Many of us attended Catholic missionary schools but

Headline **Let's fight to keep Malaysia moderate**
Date **07 Aug 2011**
MediaTitle **Sunday Star**
Section **Focus**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Weekly**
Circ / Read **320,964 / 1,072,000**

Language **English**
Page No **17**
Article Size **381 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **14,258**
PRValue **42,774**

never became Christians.

Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud has openly admitted that he studied Bible Knowledge during his school days, his family donated money to churches and, more recently, he even opened a church.

Our Royal Couple attended the church wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in April, as did many other Muslim heads of states and governments, mostly from the Commonwealth.

Our Prime Ministers have visited churches, sometimes entering the premises but not going inside the sanctuary, and they showed their respect for Malaysia's pluralism by their presence.

A day after the operation, AIDS activist Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir tweeted that she has given talks about HIV/AIDS in churches and members have had no problem listening to her.

There seems to be this suspicion, whether imagined or otherwise, that there is an attempt by churches to convert Muslims.

Church leaders are fully aware that while the Federal Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, there is also a clause which clearly states that there should be no attempt to propagate to Muslims. If any church refuses to respect this law, then it should be prepared to face the legal consequences.

At the same time, we must strive to be progressive enough to appreciate that it is good to learn the religions of fellow Malaysians. We can argue about the superiority of one's religion but it is good to be religious and God-fearing regardless of one's belief.

If Malaysians claim to be so religiously sensitive themselves, upholding and defending their religions so passionately, we wouldn't have to grapple with corruption, racism, hypocrisy and discrimination because no religion tolerates such immoral practices.

We also need to be more realistic. I have

served in a Christian-run soup kitchen in Kuala Lumpur and seen that those in need include Muslims, many of whom are homeless, destitute, drug addicts and HIV-positive or have full-blown AIDS. They are looking for a place to clean themselves so they can maintain their dignity. And they look forward to a plate of hot curry and rice served by volunteers who welcome them. They enjoy having the volunteers listen to them, never mind that sometimes the helpers can't do much.

The soup kitchen is a weekly event that lasts about an hour. Yes, there is a prayer, which Christians do before any meal, but the needy Muslims do not join in. They just wait for the food to be served and to be in good company where they are treated with respect.

Going by the logic – or illogic – of Hasan the PAS hardliner, will these poor Muslims have to be turned away by the soup kitchen helpers for fear that they would be accused of proselytisation?

Does it mean the St Nicholas Home for the Blind in Penang will have to reject Muslim students because it is Christian-based?

I studied Malay literature and Islamic History in Form Six and went on to enrol in the Malay Letters Department of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia where Islamic Civilisation was a compulsory subject. Some non-Muslim students grumbled about this requirement, citing subtle conversion, but I took it in stride and felt proud as I got to understand and appreciate Islam better. I didn't convert.

Mosques, temples and churches are an integral part of Malaysia. We proudly promote them in our tourist brochures, so why are some people so fearful of these places of worship?

We know many Malaysian Muslims visit Rome and pop over to the Vatican when they do so, but they don't become Christians.

Let's fight to keep Malaysia moderate.