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Fanning hate ends freedom

It is quite horrifying to see the level of intolerance and hostility felt by some for anything or anyone who is different from them.



PEOPLE the world over love their festivals. Malaysians are no different. It is, after all, a time to celebrate an event, bond over delicious food served in abundance and, if you are lucky, get the day off.

In the past few days, however, it would seem that some have gotten their decent and correctly designed underwear in a twist over one particular festival – the Seksualiti Merdeka festival.

This particular event has never quite made it as a “big news item” since it started in 2008.

This year, however, Seksualiti Merdeka was stopped in its tracks by an immediate police ban and made front-page headlines.

One wonders how many Malaysians have even heard of Seksualiti before this.

Or of its co-founder Pang Khee Teik.

In fact, Pang did think ahead of the possible ramifications of this festival but what he least expected was the ban.

He quite pointedly told a journalist that any coverage should preferably be done after the entire festival because of the potential backlash.

Several events were even kept out of coverage, including the opening by former Bar Council president Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan.

Let's not forget that this was the same programme that was opened by Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir back in 2009.

Seksualiti Merdeka 2011, like all its previous stagings, was, at the end of the day, about educating the masses and making some quarters less homophobic.

But reading the multitude of negative comments made through both the mainstream media and the Internet has been hurtful for those concerned.

It is quite horrifying to see the level of intolerance and hostility felt by some who view anything different as unacceptable.

Instead of extending some sense of understanding for the targeted groups, they

have chosen to go the other way and decry the festival for promoting sexual orientation that is not “straight” and promiscuity.

Firstly, organisers of the festival are not getting their message across by walking in the buff.

Neither are they showing “queer” pornography to “convert” the straights.

And, sorry to disappoint, there are no gay parades either.

For the past few years, Seksualiti Merdeka organisers have been holding a festival to create awareness that would ultimately break the shackles of discrimination, harassment and violence which exist for some simply because of their orientation and gender identities.

They believe that everyone (yes, even heterosexuals) is entitled to the freedom to love and freedom to be.

Among the events planned were talks, forums, workshops, art exhibitions and stage performances.

Now, among the questions that beg to be asked are why did the police only choose to move in on Seksualiti this year?

What threat to public order would they be?

Were the men in blue trying to avoid chaos that might be caused by those who objected to the event and would come to the venue with banners and placards shouting their protests?

But do those who remain silent even care?

Should you care about such rights? Or stop making fun of people that your “gaydar” tells you are not straight?

Imagine if your child came to you and revealed that he/she was not straight, and that they had been beaten up, ostracised or rejected from a job just for being different.

Or, even worse, driven to suicide.

This is what has happened in the past and will continue happening if pockets of Malaysians continue to live in denial that those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning community should “stay where they are and behave”.

It is not right to deny a person the right to earn a living simply because she is a transgender and therefore should not be allowed to do her job as a makeup artist.

Or that she should only be allowed to work in certain sectors of the economy because she is a transgender.

And a gentle reminder: providing information on sexuality does not spread HIV/AIDS. Keeping quiet about it will.

People are infected because they do not have the correct information to protect themselves.

Do not deny them, especially the younger

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generation, the right to accurate information.
 Stop being so full of hate.



Hammering discontent: NGO members seen demonstrating outside a mosque in Kampung Rawa, George Town, against the Seksualiti Merdeka event.