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Respect sanctity of National Mosque

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IT would seem that in their eagerness to gain mileage from Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's arsenic poisoning allegation, some non-Muslim opposition politicians are acting in a manner that may, sooner or later, arouse the anger of Muslims in the country.

They seem to have ignored the fact that Muslims in general are against mosques being used for political purposes - legal or otherwise.

Parti Keadilan Nasional and its opposition allies have, in the last one year, been playing with fire by using the safety and sanctuary of the National Mosque to hold their illegal assemblies.

But the worst happened last Sunday when they were joined by non-Muslim politicians, at least three of whom took to the microphone to address the crowd from one of the mosque's anjung (wing).

They are Chang Tian Chua and N. Gopalakrishnan of Keadilan and Teng Chang Khim of the DAP.

Either out of ignorance or in an attempt to test the feelings of Muslims, these non-Muslim politicians and other non-Muslim illegal demonstrators had trampled on the sanctity of the mosque.

Non-Muslim opposition politicians should not get carried away by the cosiness of their relationship with Keadilan and Pas so as to think that they can come and go as they like.

They must be warned of the sensitivity of the Malays when it comes to their religion. The Malays are sensitive about how others treat Islam. The mosque is the centre of the religion. It is a sacred place.

The majority of them may silently tolerate imams and guest speakers making partisan statements in their sermons and lectures in the mosques. But they cannot be expected to take kindly to non-Muslims joining illegal demonstrators in a mosque, and here we are talking about the National Mosque, and making political speeches.

Sooner or later, the attempt by Keadilan to use the National Mosque as a centre for its illegal protests, will attract a response from others.

It is amply clear that Keadilan is seeking to politicise Masjid Negara without caring that in doing so it is smearing the image and sanctity of the sacred place.

Keadilan's non-Muslim collaborators must be told that they could be playing with fire by treating the National Mosque as a political venue.

They should not get carried away with the reception they received from the protesters. Other Muslims and Malays may not be amused by their insensitivity.

They must be told not to dismiss the "amok mentality" of the reformasi demonstrators spreading to the silent Malay/Muslim majority if they continue to show disrespect for Masjid Negara and other mosques.

NON-Muslim politicians should have a better sense not to test the patience of this silent majority. Such an action can be fatal.

Just for a moment let us turn the table on the non-Muslims and non-Malays. Imagine Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor going to a Chinese temple to condemn the Chinese leadership of the country.

Or the turbaned Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat going to a Hindu temple to condemn the Indian leadership.

Would this be acceptable to the Chinese and Indians? Some may accept their condemnation of the Chinese and Indian leadership because not

everyone supports the MCA and MIC.

But would they accept Fadzil and Nik Aziz using their temples for political purposes?

Of course, Fadzil and Nik Aziz are not as foolish as that. They know no matter how closely they work with the non-Muslims and with Anwar's supporters, they should not be seen as accepting other religions as being on par with Islam.

They have been very wary about appearing at non-Muslim houses of worship as they know their orthodox and radical followers will not take kindly to such behaviour.

That is also the reason why senior Pas leaders are not seen at the Keadilan-led demonstrations although they were held at the National Mosque.

Pas will use an upstart political party like Keadilan, including its non-Muslim members, to further its political cause in the same way it used the now defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

But it is wary of embracing Keadilan's reformasi rhetoric and to give unqualified support to Anwar's legal battle. Pas leaders know they can fool some people some of the time but not all people all the time.

So it is for their own good and for the good of the country that non-Muslim opposition leaders stop using mosques for their political activities.

They should be reminded that ignorance and insensitivity had caused racial and religious disharmony before.

With neighbouring Indonesia, the home of reformasi, once again burning and bathing in blood, we should be even more concerned with a repeat of last Sunday's takeover of the National Mosque by the illegal demonstrators.

There is no way that we can allow Masjid Negara to be turned into a political venue and Kuala Lumpur to be transformed into Jakarta.

THE image of the police suffered another setback when a 29-year-old doctor was shot dead by a police constable at Bandar Tasik Selatan LRT-station at 10.30pm on Monday.

In the incident, Dr Tai Eng Teck was fatally shot when he was alleged to have tried to run down, with a car, a policeman who confronted him and his female companion.

The saving grace in this unfortunate episode is the fact that the police immediately went into action.

It had clearly learnt a lesson from the controversial case involving the former Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor.

By Thursday, a 25-year-old constable, Tony anak Beliang, was charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder. If found guilty, the accused can be jailed for up to 20 years and fined or both.

The police image suffered a major blow when Rahim admitted to the Royal Commission of Inquiry investigating Anwar's injury while in police custody last year that he caused the injury. Rahim was then the IGP.

He was charged on April 22 with attempting to cause grievous hurt to the former Deputy Prime Minister.

Following the incident and other complaints of police brutality, the force launched a public relations campaign tag-lined mesra rakyat (people-friendly).

It is not fair to indiscriminately use such terms as "trigger happy" and "brutal" to describe the action of our policemen. In some instances, even the public is in favour of force being exercised.

The public is also aware that police work entails a level of danger. Anybody choosing to serve the force should not only be aware of it but

should also be willing to accept it.

It is for this reason, too, that members of the force are trained to handle threats to themselves and to the people they are supposed to protect.

But in recent decades, as the country becomes more peaceful, our once highly regarded police force appears to be losing ability to cope with threats, leading to the use of unnecessary force and firearms.

When this happens, loss of lives and injuries are difficult to avoid. It is scary to think that members of the force, especially the young and inexperienced, are too quick at drawing their guns.

It must also be remembered that people are apprehensive when approached by policemen even when they are not doing anything wrong.

And with so many instances of the people being robbed and raped by criminals who impersonate policemen, the police must realise the people may act irrationally when approached by policemen.

As such, even the manner they approach the people is important. This is so when dealing with young people. We do not want to see young people shot by the police or crashing their cars and motorcycles for minor offences such as not having valid road tax or driving licence.

But this does not mean that we want our police force to stand aside as a small minority of people openly disobey the law by holding illegal demonstrations and using the National Mosque as a shield.

IT must be hard for the International Monetary Fund and other detractors of Malaysia's selective capital controls to now admit that the curse they put on us had not worked.

We had neither gone bankrupt, as they so confidently predicted a year ago, nor did we become an economic pariah.

In recent months they have been heaping praises on our recovery. Even the IMF has predicted that the Malaysian economy will grow faster than the one-per cent projected by the Government.

In its latest forecast in the World Economic Outlook, the IMF predicted that the Malaysian economy will grow by 2.4 per cent this year as opposed to minus 6.7 per cent last year.

By next year, the IMF expects the growth to be in the region of 6.5 per cent, outperforming other Southeast and East Asian economies, including China.

But this does not mean that we should be lulled into believing that we are out of the woods. Hard work is still ahead of us. The restructuring of the economy has to continue and some bitter pills will still have to be swallowed.

Banks and other financial institutions have to be merged to strengthen and prepare them for the more open regime as warranted by World Trade Organisation rules.

Our companies have to be restructured and reinvented to become more focused and efficient. Perhaps the era of Jack-of-all-trades-and-master-of-none is over.

It could not have been easy for the IMF to acknowledge that there is an alternative to its socially destabilising method of rescuing a faltering economy.

This is particularly so when Malaysia tried for almost a year under the stewardship of the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance the so-called virtual-IMF measures with disastrous results.

But the IMF officials and the Western free-marketeers were not the only people who wanted the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, out.

Many Malaysians, including some big businessmen, thought that he had over-stayed his welcome.

They thought he was meddling with his then deputy's economic management and was making statements that caused the ringgit and the stock market to fall. At the very least, they thought he should shut up.

But silencing Dr Mahathir is almost impossible. Of course, today the very same people who wanted him to shut up think he should be doing some talking to hype up the stock market by hinting when the general election will be held.

Talking about the election, it is ironic that for an election which is often said to be lopsided, rigged and unfair, Malaysia's general election is perhaps one of the most awaited.

So our general election cannot be all that bad after all. Otherwise, how can the Opposition be so sure that they will form the next Government and outsiders be so very interested in it?

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