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Let's leave morality to individual families

By Johan Jaaffar

THE Cabinet came out with the most sensible statement on the arrest of 100 young Muslims at a nightclub in Kuala Lumpur recently: "Morality issue is best left to the family." Moderate Muslims in the country sighed with relief. For the rest, it is a clear indication we are not heading towards "Talibanism." The Government has reiterated its position that no one should hijack the religious agenda, not even overzealous officers from some of its own ministries.

Officers of the Federal Territory Religious Affairs Department (Jawi) raided a nightclub in Jalan Ampang and according to reports, arrested and humiliated them, even deprived them of going to the toilet.

They herded the young people like common criminals and locked them up for almost 10 hours, and were left at the mercy of an officer and his men who seemed to be taking pleasure watching some of the skimpily-dressed girls.

They were sadly doing it in the name of Islam. We have seen this before. And we will see many more such irresponsible acts if left unchecked.

No one questions their right to check on nightclubs or even conduct such raids.

But, they should at least understand the procedures and respect the rights of others.

The most important element in the statement made by the Cabinet was that the country's needs would be best served if the police look after crime prevention and matters of morality are handled by the family.

The Cabinet too will have to evaluate whether the power to detain people should be taken out of the hands of religious authorities and placed only in the hands of the police. We all know the police are entrusted with every conceivable problem our society is facing today. Considering, they have done remarkably well.

The crime rate in this country is probably among the lowest in developing countries. Yet, they need to be more vigilant.

Even the Prime Minister is concerned about the crime rate that is in fact increasing dramatically. Assisting Jawi to raid nightclubs should be their last priority.

I must commend Puteri Umno's stand on the issue.

Its chief, Noraini Ahmad, was correct in saying that until and unless Muslims are banned from places like nightclubs that served liquor, the young have the right to go to such places to unwind and listen to live bands. She asked: "What if one of the Muslim patrons happens to be a woman in baju kurung who decides to turn up at the pub for some good music? Is that wrong too?"

This is not an easy issue to deal with. Not even the most seasoned of politicians would dare come out strongly on the issue. But Datuk Shahrizat Jalil, as always, defied prevailing wisdom to take a stand on the issue. And Puteri's Noraini did not mince her words, arguing for sanity.

The silent majority among the Malays have been incensed with high-handedness of some of these people.

Remember the Rela member who took a photograph of a woman urinating?

In the quest to ensure others are morally correct, one forgets his own akhlak.

For far too long we have been unfair to the young. We are supposed to be a modern, tolerant and open society.

The young are not like us, mind you. They love music, watch movies, enjoy live bands, surf the Net, talk to far-away friends and they are certainly more open-minded than most of us. Those who go to many of these exclusive nightclubs or pubs are not the ones who harass you with their screaming and modified motorbikes every Saturday night in KL.

These young people live a different culture and life altogether. They frequent these places because they can afford it. Please, the girls cannot be labeled "GROs" and of loose character simply because they go to these places.

They are not the ones who commit rape, get into incestuous relationship or become road bullies. Most of them are law abiding citizens.

Many of them are young professionals who just want to have fun.

What message are we sending our young? It is haram to hear music, to listen to Simple Plan, Avril Lavigne, Hillary Duff, Green Day or Hanson? We must then ban the Internet (pornography in abundance), 24 hour TV (bad influence on Muslims) and even gossip in the newspapers (bad for morality). Please!

We give out licences to operate nightclubs, pubs, coffee-houses, even dangdut joints. We allow discotheques and dance halls to operate. We allow liquor to be served even in our planes. Yet we raid some of these premises not on security grounds but to make sure we rid them of Muslim patrons.

Once upon a time, a state set up a Amal Makruf and Nahi Mungkar brigade to pry on fellow Muslims. It was disbanded when the officers were caught harassing Indonesian workers for money.

In many instances, the performances of these moral policemen were judged by the number of arrests they made on those they perceived as committing khalwat (close proximity).

Even Dewan Bandaraya enforcement officers think it is their responsibility to make sure young couples do not hold hands in public!

We must ask ourselves then, where are we heading?

As I have argued before, as the Malays get more Islamic, they become less Malay.

They discard everything that is even remotely misconstrued as un-Islamic, even their culture. They chide others for not conforming.

In the last many years, the Malays have made too many adjustments to accommodate the new demands. And there is no middle road for these zealots. Even Hari Raya entertainment programmes should be stopped - No Hiburan Please, We're Muslims.

Islamisation has taken a new dimension in this country.

Call it jumping on the Islamic bandwagon, a term loathed even by the fundamentalists, yet everyone talks about the need to be more Islamic. Even our schools are not Islamic enough.

But they miss a crucial point - Muslims are not better off now with just rituals, proper attire and pronouncements.

In the times of the Abbasids and Ummayyads, the elite among the Muslims were administrators, thinkers, philosophers, scientists, writers, travellers, artists, cosmologists, inventors and creators.

As rightly pointed out by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the last time the world ushered in a new millenium, the Islamic civilisation was at its zenith. Today, Islamic civilisation is at its lowest ebb. What happened along the way?

Why can't we spend some time giving serious thought to it rather than planning a raid on another nightclub?

(END) Source : New Straits Times