

26/02/2005

Tackle this serious Malay dilemma

By Munir Majid

THERE are so many very good things about Malaysia. Some not so good.

If we continually highlight only the very good things, will it chase away the not-so-good? Hound them out of the park, if not quite sweep them under the carpet?

If we turned the spotlight on the not so good, will it not strike fear, even cause conflict, and subsume the good?

Surely the sensible and logical answer would be to address them in proportion and with a duty of care.

In Malaysia, we have chosen to be cautious about openly discussing the not-so-good things which have a depth and a threat of getting out of hand.

We don't mind going on about littering, spitting and toilet habits, but don't want a free-for-all on, for instance, racial issues.

It has been proven there is wisdom in this.

The social engineering process to address the economic disparity between the Malays and the non-Malays has, while keeping discussion of the more volatile issues behind closed-doors, been able to close the gap, even if not to the ultimate satisfaction.

The progress in terms of greater openness in discussing some of the issues - such as what is wrong with the Malays? (a subject which got Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's The Malay Dilemma banned) - is increasingly evident.

Nowadays, we can criticise the largely Malay public service or the mainly Malay-constructed national school system, without untowardly making a racial issue out of them, because universal values such as service delivery, efficiency and competitiveness have taken hold.

This does not mean we no longer owe that duty of care when discussing issues that have racial significance - and there are reactionary pockets of resistance - but it does show we have begun to open up on matters which had hitherto been considered out-of-bounds because of their racial connotations, as we face the fundamental realities of globalisation.

There is, however, another serious macro matter that needs careful consideration and handling.

While not new, the ugly drama played out by the JAWI enforcement officers during a raid on a Kuala Lumpur nightspot a month ago highlights another significant divide in the Malaysian society, essentially among the Malays, but also having an important implication on the nature of that society - for all Malaysians.

Rule of law

MOST of the comments on that incident had focused on the rough and unsavoury treatment dished out that night by the enforcement officers, especially to the girls. They violated individual rights, proper procedure and due process. There was a kind of mob rule, and not the rule of law which is the foundation of our society.

This is a fundamentally serious violation which cannot be countenanced and those who countenance it clearly do not believe in the rule of law that governs our society. They believe in a different order of society.

There are those who support this action, which means they also want a different form of society, or misunderstand the kind of society we live in. This is a divide which transcends the differences between Pas and Umno.

This chasm among the Malays has to be addressed with the same commitment as that between Malays and non-Malays, and has the complication of its

being a religious matter.

The Islam Hadhari which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi posits is opposed by those who support the kind of action carried out by the JAWI officers, and the thinking underlying it - an Islam that intrudes, forces and hands out immediate retribution.

Which is the true Islam? We may err when we talk about "moderate" or even "enlightened" Islam, as it implies some kind of qualification from the total reality.

We must be positive and talk about the right and true Islam for all ages, an Islam which is loving, understanding and forgiving, an Islam which does not believe in force and cruelty, but in persuasion and faith.

It recognises differences and rights, among other things essentially expressed in Al-Kafirun, a verse most Muslims recite in prayer five times a day.

Be that as it may, there are nevertheless those who understand Islam differently, the ones who must be engaged if they are not to become a serious threat to our society and nation.

Apart from threat to the nature of society and nation, future progress can also be undermined. Much needed talent will be lost or will not come our way.

An intolerant society is not attractive at all. Many young people - qualified and competitive - will leave, perhaps for societies totally secular in outlook, with no religious anchor.

Many more, whom we need, will not even entertain the thought of coming back. What would all this have gained?

We must begin to be a little more open about this danger and threat, and to engineer a resolution.

The JAWI enforcement officers have pointed to an underlying issue which is a matter of grave importance to the Malays and to Malaysia. It calls for a committed approach to resolve differences as focused as that which informed the process of finding a solution to the great racial economic divide.

The Muslim community must get together to understand each other's perspectives, instead of acting and reacting in a manner that leads to polarisation.

The thing is to discover Islam in a loving, tolerant and dynamic light, such as in the principles of Islam Hadhari.

(END) Source : New Straits Times