

PM-Christian meet confounds more than clarifies
Malaysiakini.com
May 13, 2011

COMMENT One headline 'Christian leaders pledge to respect Islam's status' was intimation enough about what went on at yesterday's meeting between Christian leaders and Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Ostensibly called to sooth ruffled Christian feathers over allegedly inflammatory reports in Utusan Malaysia, the meeting, as some had feared, did not just fail to come to grips with the underlying issue; it confounded it, if Najib's remarks to the media afterwards were a guide.

The PM said he was encouraged by two undertakings given by the Christian leaders he met: one, that they will respect the status of Islam as the official religion of this country; and two, that they will cooperate in nurturing peace and harmony among the various faiths.

By implication, these undertakings had to be rendered because there have been doubts about the track record of Christians in respect of the two matters.

Two chapters of our very recent history ought to be noted for perspective.

PM Najib Razak speaks to the press outside the gutted administrative block of Metro Tabernacle church 1Early last year, when the 'Allah' issue was rife, a series of arson attacks on churches occurred without stirring Christians to high dudgeon: they knew agent provocateurs were at work and that an adverse reaction would only aggravate matters.

These arson attacks were followed by what appeared to look like retaliatory attacks on Muslim places of worship, such as the desecration of a mosque through the dumping of pig heads on the premises.

Like the Christians, the Muslim community was not moved to anger by these incidents of arson and desecration: they knew devious elements were exploiting matters for base political ends.

These incidents and the general public reaction suggested that the maturity of the ordinary man in the street was of a higher vintage than that of certain politicians and assorted columnists of decidedly incendiary bent.

A radical leap?

More than a year on from the inflammatory incidents that had petered out on the national consciousness like a dud grenade, the public are propositioned by Utusan Malaysia to believe that some Christians are plotting to supplant Islam with Christianity as the official religion and that they are praying for a Christian to be PM of Malaysia.

This hypothesis must represent a radical leap in the Malaysian Christian outlook - from a community that only a year ago was rather nonchalant in the face of arson attacks on churches, it has supposedly metamorphosed into sinister and seditious subversives, plotting to down Islam.

It would be more plausible to believe that the Dalai Lama has suddenly become a fire-breathing Tibetan radical than for Christian Malaysians to plot a Christian makeover to their country.

Still, Christian church leaders yesterday felt obliged, presumably at PM Najib's request, to assure that they harboured no subversive intentions to the constitution and country, and would not cease to be a willing party to efforts at national concord and reconciliation.

Presumably, upon receipt of the assurance, the Home Ministry rapped Utusan's editor across the knuckles for the reports that had led to the whole controversy.

No doubt, novelists of the mettle of Abdullah Hussein, the author of 'Interlok', would find in these details grist for another work of imagination that would be commended to a later generation of Form 5 students in Malaysia.

It would be anybody's guess which community would then take umbrage at the slurs the work may well contain.

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