

One-way ticket to paradise
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COMMENT As I write this, only God knows the fate of the young Saudi journalist who made a pit stop to freedom here in Malaysia but was returned to his homeland from which he sought refuge.

So far only a few, among them DAP's Charles Santiago, MP for Klang, and PKR vice-president N Surendran, have worked up the courage to speak out.

PAS has made murmurs of their hopes that Hamza Kashgari will get a "fair trial" in Saudi Arabia. I would rather PAS remain totally silent than issue such drivel because at least their silence would mean one less thing Umno and them have in common.

Of the charge of blasphemy, a snippet from that wily Persian scholar, Jalaluddin Rumi, comes to mind:

We speak of God who is hidden
Describing the indescribable.
You philosophise, I only criticise
Another refutes us both.

The middle ground is an Umno mine-strewn battlefield, where principle or foolhardy combatants end up pondering their miscalculations in the Kamunting afterlife after an explosive public lynching.

This is a war of attrition and if you're a Pakatan Rakyat supporter how many can you afford to lose?

In this propaganda war, what issues, National Feedlot Corporation, for example, are you willing to sacrifice, when protestations based on human rights, freedom of speech and human dignity are portrayed as attacks against Islam and the Malay community, thereby gaining coverage in the mainstream press?

Hisham's demur explanations

NONE Home Minister Hishammuddin Onn's rather demur explanations of an understanding with Saudi Arabia and "charges" that is best determined by the administrators of Mecca, hints of the fears of both Umno and the House of Saud that the only real martyrs are accidental ones.

Who knows what an impetuous young man who in a fit of anger (or hope) articulated the yearnings of thousands of Muslims who seek a way out from the shackles that some regimes impose on them under the cloak of piety, could inspire?

If Umno is wary of entering the octagon in this issue, so is Pakatan. PAS and PKR already in a political life and death struggle with the state for the soul of the Malay community, each side reshaping Islam to fit their narrative of solidarity no doubt are wary of entering into a public feud which would put their Islamic credentials on the line.

The last time this happened was the fracas over the use of the word 'Allah' and the only party that benefited was the DAP - in Sarawak.

The DAP, on the other hand, is having trouble of its own. Its Chinese credentials although not in any significant danger, is coming under attack from BN's component parties and the MCA has never had a problem asking the DAP to make a principled stand even though such motivations seem to elude the MCA.

It doesn't help the situation that the DAP has been aggressively courting the Malay/Muslim vote. An issue like this which is easily twisted in the hands of the various outsourced ideological thugs in Umno's employ, is an IED (improvised explosive device), which could blow up in the faces of all involved.

This is more than just a simple matter of Malaysia being a safe haven for "wanted men". Bear in mind at this moment, the state wants to retrieve the bodies of Malaysian-born terrorists that have murdered people on foreign soil.

This is the country where Hishammuddin eulogised Noordin Mohammad Top's death as "a life is a life" and "we could have rehabilitated him". And what is Kashgari's life worth? And rehabilitating him would not have been a problem since he recanted what he wrote and was running away in mortal fear.

The joke is on Kashgari

The treatment of Kashgari mirrors the treatment of many of the country's dissidents who ironically are now in a position to speak out against this injustice but who so far have chosen to remain silent.

Kashgari was detained against his will. He was denied access to his legal representatives. Does this sound familiar?

And if we can grant asylum to thousand of Indonesians, Filipinos and Burmese and make them constitutional Malays, why not protect a young Muslim journalist who in a fit of misguided (in a Muslim context) passion, tweeted his feelings about his religion and later recanted?

In a world of religious extremism, isn't this sort of Muslim that we want in this country or at the very least, usher him out of this country as a symbolic gesture of the moderate Islamic stance this country and this prime minister professes to adhere to.

As the de facto law minister concedes, the judiciary was compromised by the executive during Dr Mahathir Mohamad's tenure. Of course, we have been reassured that successive prime ministers have had very little influence on the judiciary. You will forgive me for not taking you on your word, Nazri Abdul Aziz.

I have no idea if the injunction is a fig leaf measure to assure Malaysians of the integrity of our judicial system just as the acquittal of Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim was meant to demonstrate that anyone can get a fair trial here.

I do know that Hishammuddin's denial of any such injunction reeks of the usual sandiwara that manifests whenever a spotlight is shone on contentious issues such as these.

The whole wretched affair is the usual shadow play, which most citizens have come to expect and even joke about. Except this time, the joke is on Kashgari, a foreigner who just doesn't get it and the punch line will most probably be his execution.

Pakatan must speak up

How Pakatan handles this as a political alternative to the BN will show us the kind of foreign policy Malaysia will have if ever the opposition coalition sweeps into power.

Will Pakatan have an "understanding" with Saudi Arabia and so-called "wanted" men and women who have done nothing but express their feelings for a strain of Islam which is practiced there but not here be expatriated back to their home countries in the dead of the night?

Will the non-Muslim members of this alternative front who see fit to raise questions on the impropriety of Muslim groups here dictating how Muslim should behave on Valentine's Day, remain silent, in the face of international pressure? Is this the alternative to BN that we are pinning our hopes on?

Even though I've painted a bleak realpolitik picture, if Pakatan which prides itself on being the only moderate force in this country does not speak up, the only real losers would be its supporters - both Muslim and non-Muslim.

hadi awang, anwar ibrahim, lim kit siang, pakatan leaders This is time, and this is definitely the issue, for PAS and PKR to demonstrate their moderate Islamic credentials. And this is an issue where the DAP has to establish itself as a vocal partner when it comes to questions involving the role of Islam in the domestic and international scenes.

If this issue is ignored or we pretend it does not matter, we will always live in the shadow of a state which would not hesitate to use Islam as a weapon against any its views as compromising its hold over the country or if Pakatan ever comes into power, they will be subservient to extremist groups who will realise their lack of resolve translates into weakness.

I sincerely hope that Pakatan reveals a depth of character which they claim they have and issue a unified response to the federal government, whose act of extraditing this young innocent man to possible death, is unacceptable for a country and government which claims to be a moderate voice in the turbulent sea of radical Muslim regimes.

If Pakatan does not discover its backbone quickly and instead chooses to remain silent, not wanting this issue to be another obstacle to their path to Putrajaya, all they would have done is to remind the rabid minority that in the end they will always be cowed and slaves to political expediency and not proponents of justice.

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