

No excuse for temple fracas in 1Malaysia

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COMMENT I am a Hindu born and raised in Malaysia. My sisters, cousins, mother, father, their siblings, even their parents were born and raised here.

I have best friends of all races, I know the "right way" of using chopsticks, wore a kebaya for my wedding reception, got married in a church and a temple and have a Malaysian flag stuck in my car and well, tick all the boxes when it comes to being an ideal Malaysian. At least I used to think so.

Yet three decades on, I return from a short trip abroad to the news that Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) officers had allegedly wore shoes, smoked and damaged statues of deities at a Hindu temple in Jalan P Ramlee in the act of removing the statues to make way for construction for 30-storey tower block next door. Welcome home.

jalan p ramlee temple demolition 010913The statues were unceremoniously removed, allegedly hacked out from the 101-year old Muneswarar temple in the Golden Triangle before proper prayers can be carried out to have them relocated, amidst claims that no notice was issued.

Even we, Hindus, are not allowed to simply manhandle statues and proper prayers must be done before an altar at home is moved, what more in a temple proper and in such an angry manner.

When a group of Buddhists used a surau for meditation with permission of the Muslim resort owner, all hell broke loose with the resort owner being remanded, his permanent resident status revoked and the surau earmarked for demolition. But now it would appear that government staff do not think twice of defiling another's place of worship.

We are Malaysians, we were raised to know not to wear shoes in homes and in suraus, mosques, temples and most places of worship.

jalan p ramlee temple demolition 010913So, getting Indian ministers to justify the council's actions does not make it right. Even when no standard operating procedures (SOP) exist governing the conduct of DBKL personnel who carry out enforcement at places of worship.

Is the Federal Territories Ministry suggesting that the lack of special provisions in black and white means the workers and the council department head who planned, ordered and oversaw the "ambush operation" can be excused from what they did and the manner in which they did it?

What happened to common sense?

Forget the fact the temple was over a century old. Forget the fact the statues were claimed to be sitting on state land and the council was "taking it back". Forget that it was a Hindu temple and the affected section of the temple was "not a shrine per se".

The bare facts of the matter is that it was a place of worship, to which community, race or religion really does not matter. It was a House of God. That in itself should have demanded the situation be handled with care and sensitivity.

jalan p ramlee temple demolition 010913But where was common sense? In the absence of any pre-outline protocol, the council's every move thereafter should have been instinctive, borne of 56 years of nationhood, the result of a unique and truly beautiful multicultural framework we so proudly extol in our 'Malaysia Truly Asia' advertisements to tourists overseas.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, no surprises, has been characteristically mum on the issue, as he is with most racially and religiously-divisive controversies which have arisen post-general election.

Yet we do not need Najib to say that this incident should never have taken place, not one day after Merdeka Day, not ever. Not, too, should any of the other similar incidences which have hurt the various races and religious beliefs in the country.

There can be no excuse. In fact, there was just no respect, plain and simple.

And until and unless the powers-that-be see or choose to see this, true national unity will remain a lip-service and mere fodder for our tourism industry.

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