

Najib posits a false equation

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COMMENT He rarely speaks up for moderation, on the domestic front at least, and rarer still, match deed to word to show what he means by the term.

He confines his espousal of the middle octaves to foreign forums where he is seen, no less than people like Barack Obama, as a moderate Muslim.

You would think that when domestically he does step up to the moderate plate, he would get his coordinates right in erecting the ideological scaffolding for his position.

But judging from what he said at the launch of the Institute Wasatiyah (Moderate) Malaysia in Putrajaya yesterday, Prime Minister Najib Razak was propounding a kind of equivalence theory - and one that is patently false.

He said that both liberalism - meaning human rights theories, particularly sexual rights theories, emanating from the West - and extremism - presumably religious extremism - are twin threats to the country and menaced the 'moderate' position for which he has chosen to be the prime exponent in this country and perhaps the region.

As an inkling of what he meant by the toxicity of liberalism, he referred to the recent case of the Malaysian student in London who was jailed for 18 months for possession of 30,000 child pornographic videos.

Najib said Nur Fitri Azmeer Nordin's (photo) addiction to pornography was due to an excess of the liberal outlook on life.

As diagnostic theories go, this has about as much plausibility as that which holds that if you remove Israel from the Middle East, the level of violence in the Middle East would drop drastically.

No doubt, PM Najib hasn't heard that when a detachment of American seals attacked and killed Osama bin Laden in his redoubt in Abbottabad in Pakistan in May 2011, they found numerous pornographic videos in the al-Qaeda leader's hideout.

Osama was not the first terrorist to be found in possession of pornography when their lairs were flushed out.

The frequency with which those who engaged in terrorist violence were found in possession of pornographic material does not in itself support a conclusion that there is a link between terrorism and pornography.

But when it was discovered that pornography was in wide and fluid circulation in

Yugoslavia (this was in the pre-Internet era) before the horrific fratricide that dismembered the country in 1990s, a theory began to emerge about pornography's function as a way of being for rapists wanting to dehumanise women and children, and of invasion as a male right.

It may be that in a pornography-saturated mind, a radical ideology finds conditions conducive for its growth.

Najib's fingering of liberalism as spawning grounds for Nur Fitri's pathological addiction to child pornography ought to be subjected to the ridicule it deserves.

Liberalism has nothing to do with perversions

Liberalism - the matrix of political and cultural theory that enabled the flourishing of the individual within a civil ambience that emphasises rights and corresponding obligations - has nothing to do with the perversions and pathologies that beset the usual quota of dysfunctional dregs in society.

As for religious extremism, it is more likely to arise from arrogant certainty of one's rectitude based on adherence to literalistic interpretations of scriptural texts than from a tendency to see people - others and us - as fellow creatures of the splendor and travail of this earth and this life.

The antidote for religious extremism is the pluralistic personality, one who rejects monism - the theory that holds that one principle explains everything - who mines wisdom from multiple sources, who discovers that learning comes from a certain humility, a certain hesitance to judge others too quickly, and who proceeds by a generous watchfulness for possible errors in one's own perceptions.

The conditions for the development of this pluralistic personality already exist in the diversity and pluralism of our society.

But the shots these many years in our country have been called by a diversity-despising and pluralism-hating lot.

Sadly, there is no political leader courageous enough to call them out and it looks like that this state of affairs will continue into the foreseeable future, notwithstanding the prolific penchant of new prime ministers to dredge up one nebulous religious concept after another to sustain their threadbare visions.