

DAP should mull 'no entry' zone
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COMMENT It would help if the DAP imposes on its members and elected representatives a 'no entry' sign on matters Islamic.

This prohibition zone should not be seen as an unwarranted limitation - for a champion of secularism in a country where more than half of the population adhere to a religion that does not recognise church-state separation, the 'no go' restriction makes shrewd tactical sense.

Given the tendency of Umno-supporting blogs and Utusan Malaysia to portray as encroachment any interface between elected non-Muslim representatives and Muslims in mosque areas, it is better for secularist DAP to confine this interaction to uncontroversial settings.

kuala terengganu by election dap dinner 140109 nik aziz Really, it's no help to say that Islamists of the stature of Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Aziz Nik Mat see nothing wrong with non-Muslims entering a mosque to mix with Muslims for welfare ends.

Even if he were not a supporter of the implementation of hudud, to which the DAP - like legions of non-Muslims in Malaysia - is adamantly opposed, the DAP's attitude to Nik Aziz in these matters should be, "Thanks, but no thanks."

It's not as if Nik Aziz is trying to win over DAP with one hand to conjure away its objections to hudud with the other; it's just that it makes better tactical sense to stick with the position that religion has its necessarily circumscribed place in a democracy.

Beyond that place, in the secularist view, it is unwise to allow religion greater play.

To demonstrate the efficacy and cogency of that stance, it is sound tactical sense for a secularist party to avoid getting entangled in arguments ineluctably connected to religion which willy-nilly becomes the case when a Lim Guan Eng uses an Islamic trope to make a point about good governance or a Teo Nie Ching visits a mosque for a communitarian purpose.

Religious arguments are inherently irresolvable - fodder for the secularist position that a polity functions better if it is secular democratic rather than theocratic.

Secular democracy not void of religion

A secular democracy does not mean that the public square is void of all influence of religion; rather, it does not lean on any one religion as a criterion of value.

NONEA self-imposed 'no entry' zone on matters Islamic should not preclude DAP chairman Karpal Singh from publicly airing his objections to hudud. But it would certainly help if he airs those objections with more linguistic finesse and savvy.

Saying that implementation of hudud would change the "basic structure" rather than the basic character of the federal constitution is to miss things by a mile. The value of semantic precision cannot be overestimated in exchanges of this sort.

Years ago, Karpal committed a dreadful faux pas by saying that an Islamic state can only be introduced in Malaysia over his dead body. Credit to him, he has since withdrawn and apologised for that statement.

But ownership of a statement like that, albeit disavowed, weakens your standing as a non-Muslim interlocutor vis-a-vis Islamists.

For non-Muslims holding forth on matters Islamic, it's like treading on a carpet on which needles have been spilt. Better to avoid doing it at all than even to tiptoe.

A policy of respectful avoidance is preferable to being caught splay-footed and messy. It also reduces the room for the rabid among Pakatan Rakyat's adversaries to stoke tensions and muddy the waters.

The self-imposed ban is prudent in times like these.

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