

**Door to any house of worship is open**  
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"I sincerely and genuinely reiterate that my visit to the Surau Al-Huda was not politically motivated, and had no motive to put into question the sanctity of suraus and mosques," Serdang Mp Teo Nie Ching said on Saturday...

Teo explained that she had visited the Kajang surau on Sunday, Aug 22, as their MP, in order to hand over to them the state government's monetary contribution for repairs to the surau fence... She had timed her visit in order to break fast with the surau's committee members and congregation...

NONE"Since I was invited to say a few words, I in all sincerity gave a brief explanation of the state's education programmes that benefit the people of Selangor," she said, adding that she welcomed advice from all parties on better execution of her duties... (Malaysiakini report, Aug 28, 2010)

The Perkasa panic over Teo's visit to a surau in Kajang intrigues me. The latter had gone there in humility to present a state donation to repair the fence. She is now a sensation and forced to mend fences. She may be meeting with the biggest religious head of the state - the Sultan. There will be repercussions. There has already been.

To be equating what she did with the fate of the American modern revolutionary leader Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabbaz) - that 'Brother Malcolm' was supposedly assassinated because he was preaching to Christians - is to be totally ignorant of what happened in the history of the American Civil Rights movements.

It signifies that one does not have any clue at all to the close relationship between Malcolm X and the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr, a Southern Baptist minister in the Christian and Nation of Islam struggle for equality and equally opportunity. But then again, perhaps some Malay ultra-fascist nationalist groups do not read much of anything to exist as anything.

At a time when Malaysia is celebrating its "Merdeka", or whatever one may call this nationalistic ritual, we are seeing the continuation of the absurdity of arguments over religion, by way of crises manufactured so that attention can be taken away from the larger issue of the present regime in the process of being dismantled.

malaysia merdeka 50th anniversary 280807Malaysia's "Merdeka ... Merdeka ..." cry will be greeted elsewhere - buried in the psyche of the nation - with chants of "diperhamba ... diperhamba..." or "enslaved .. enslaved...", referring to the closing of the captive mind and the notion of Hang Nadim (who saved Singapore from the swordfish) in chains.

Because the manufacturing of crises and the bogeyman called race and ethnicity is no longer a working tool of structural violence to be deployed as a reason to create havoc and chaos come the 13th general election, religion becomes the next available sharp object to pry open the mind of Malaysians so that fear of another riot can be filter-funneled into them.

I hope Malaysians will in no way buy into this script a la Friday the 13th, The Texas Chainsaw Massace, or even Pontianak Gua Musang, written by those who wish to deface Islam by way of associating visiting its house of worship as a "blasphemous" act. Only

simple-minded people masked as sophisticated racists, handsomely paid and in need of cheap publicity, will resort to such orchestrations.

#### Opening doors to understanding

Let us leave this "tabloidic" notion of what is ailing Malaysians religiously. There is a larger concern of how much we have progressed this Merdeka when it comes to understanding each others' religion.

There is an urgent need for peaceful dialogue on the universality of religion and the common destiny of humankind charted via different paths, before violences become a norm for conflict resolution. Only through education can respect and tolerance be made a culture, although in Malaysia this will take a few more generations, assuming that ten steps back are not orchestrated in this difficult but desired path to peaceful agenda towards developmentalism.

Essentially - all religions are monotheistic, and even in evolved philosophies and folk religion too, the submission of the self is to one the great force of peace.

Every summer, I have been teaching comparative religion as well here in the United States and nothing like what is reported in some tabloidic news media is happening. The door to any house of worship is open to anyone to learn from each other, provided that the intent is right and the visitor respects the ethics of visiting.

multiple religious religion icons 181207It is necessary for the visitor to first find out what are the dos and don'ts of visiting the place. I assign my students to visit masjid, Buddhist temples, synagogues, Catholic and Protestant churches, Hindu temples, and even the Church of Scientology and the Native American reservation, to get them to learn about something they have never known before.

The result - fantastic opening up of doors to further understanding the beauty of the varieties of religious knowledge - and strengthening one's own belief.

In Teo's surau visit incident, Malaysians are learning to differentiate between rational and ridiculous arguments. I would go for an all-out promotion of the teaching of comparative religions as early as in our high schools and especially in our universities. There is tremendous value in such a course offering.

Our hope as Malaysians is to taste "Merdeka" (freedom) in the way we think about religious tolerance and not to continue to be "diperhamba" (enslaved) by any well-paid ultra-nationalistic-fascist group, out to close shut the Malaysian mind - especially that of the Malays.

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