

**Race Relations Act may not help**  
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COMMENT The proposal to have a Race Relations Act as a deterrent to racist taunts seeks a legislative solution to a problem that is essentially social requiring education and other prescriptions to ease it.

Social maladies, like racist taunts and baby dumping, are notoriously impervious to the impact of legislative deterrents. In fact, resort to the latter is an admission that society's educative and other measures that dispense socially emollient nostrums are defective.

malaysians 050905To rely on legislative prescriptions for problems such as racist taunts without requisite attention to educational solutions is to place the cart before the horse.

DAP chairman Karpal Singh's call that the government speed up the drafting of a Race Relations Act to deter racist taunts or slurs is now seconded by the Bar Council.

Both the DAP and the Bar Council are against the introduction of hudud. How different is the Islamist argument, recently espoused by PAS spiritual leader Nik Aziz Nik Mat, that hudud is a deterrent to baby dumping from the one that proposes a legislative deterrent to verbal offences against social proprieties?

Not much. Both rely on the deterrent threat of force to check phenomena that value transmission through education and social nurture would be better able to tackle.

Real causes of racist slurs

Quite apart from how a legislated deterrent to racist taunts would burden an already creaky crime prevention and enforcement system, think of how it would divert attention from the essential causes of racist slurs.

These are the racial polarisation that permeates the educational sphere, racial employment quotas, race-based equity requirements for owning and doing business, and race-based political parties.

Against a social, economic and political matrix conducive to racist slurs, only personal refinement restrains the impulse to taunt others racially, whether provoked or otherwise.

Man is a reed, albeit as the philosopher Pascal said, a thinking one. But even a thinking reed needs the milieu in which to survive and flourish.

Deck him out with the education, equip him with the social and economic skills to keep body and soul together, set him free within universally validated conventions of political society, and you will get someone whose speech needs no policing except by the unwritten rules of polite society.

Too idealistic? Well, opt then for the legislated deterrent and pave the way for the mentality that puts its faith in medieval prescriptions for problems that wax and wane with the level of culture and learning in society.

