

# We must maintain the bridges of faith and unity

MALAYSIA has long been admired for its multicultural and multi-religious character.

With Malays, Chinese, Indians, Punjabis, and indigenous communities living together for generations, this country has always stood out as a unique model of diversity.

But still, there are moments when harmony is placed under strain - like the recent case of a non-Muslim being slapped allegedly for eating in public during fasting hours.

There will always be such moments when misunderstanding boils over, especially in this day and age when every little thing is amplified by social media and politicised by those pushing a divisive agenda.

That is not to say that we Malaysians have lost our spirit of

tolerance. On the contrary, the vast majority of us continue to live, work, and celebrate side by side in peace.

But the mutual understanding and respect that forms the foundation of that peace cannot be taken for granted. They must be nurtured, especially when the rest of the world feels more divided than ever.

Religious and racial tension, when left unaddressed, can quietly erode trust between communities. And in a country as richly diverse as ours, trust is everything.

When one group feels judged, excluded, or disrespected, it creates room for resentment - a resentment that could chip away at the national unity we all value.

What we need now is a national commitment to interfaith under-

standing - not as a public relations effort but as a sincere, long-term investment in our future.

Interfaith programmes must be a core part of our education system, community initiatives, and national identity.

Dialogues among religious leaders, cultural exchange events, and inclusive education on world religions can go a long way in dispelling stereotypes and building empathy.

Young Malaysians are less likely to fear or misunderstand people different from them if they learn about different customs and beliefs.

Our schools and homes must become places where curiosity is encouraged and respect is second nature.

The role of leadership is also crucial.

Politicians, community leaders, and media figures must set the tone by modelling inclusive behaviour and speaking out against intolerance. Silence or, worse, justification of extremist actions only emboldens those who seek to divide.

Encouragingly, there are already many Malaysians doing the quiet work of fostering unity. Across the country, interfaith dinners, peace forums, and joint charitable efforts have long been bringing people together.

These initiatives often don't make headlines, but they are the threads that hold our social fabric together. They deserve more attention, more support, and more replication.

Let us take the recent incident not as a sign that we are failing but as a reminder that we still

have work to do.

Unity is not a destination we reach and forget - it is something we must continuously shape through action, dialogue, and compassion.

As Malaysians, we are more alike than we sometimes realise: We all share hopes for a better future, love for our families, and a desire to live in peace.

These shared values must be our guiding light as we navigate the complexities of faith and identity in a diverse nation.

Now is the time to renew our commitment to each other, not just in words but also in deeds because genuine respect is not merely about tolerance. It is about understanding, empathy and the recognition that every faith has a place in this land we call home.