

berita **NECF**

EDITORIAL

'Shalom' peace in the midst of strife

THE recent Court of Appeal judgment has reignited the debate over the use of "Allah" and how Muslims and Christians in Malaysia address God in Bahasa Malaysia. Views have been expressed from all quarters and there is no sign the controversy will end.

The judgment was followed by the seizure and then release of the latest issue of the Catholic newsletter, *The Herald*, in Kota Kinabalu.

More recently, Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA) distributed 70,000 leaflets at mosques throughout the country after Friday prayers slamming the Coalition of Malaysian NGOs in the Universal Periodic Review Process (COMANGO) for being a threat to Islam by promoting human rights and civil liberties. One of ISMA's complaints was also against Christians for using the word "Allah". ISMA named several other NGOs supporting COMANGO, highlighting the Christian Federation Malaysia (CFM) at the top of the list.

Enough has been said on this trend of intolerance. Suffice to say, if it continues, communities may be polarised even more, with the present anger and frustration escalating further.

This is the context we are in as we approach Christmas. In these times, Luke 2:13–14 is particularly refreshing,

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (NIV)

The heavenly host together with the angel in making this announcement may have had in mind the biblical prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 9:6, "that a child is born and a son is given and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace".

In our Advent journey, Christians should remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the Prince of Peace. He was sent to proclaim good tidings and to bring peace to those on whom His favour rests.

Peace is not just the cessation of hostility and conflict. The Bible's *shalom* peace is much more than that. The Hebrew word denotes wholeness, completeness, a sense of prosperity and harmony, a state whereby all facets of life and of society function coherently together.

Such a description of peace may feel far-fetched in a society like ours today.

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But if the nativity scene is instructive, the words of the heavenly host must truly resonate with us as Christians, who are to be agents of peace and blessings to those around us.

What then, does seeking peace and goodwill mean, even as we pursue truth, justice and righteousness? What does peace mean, when speaking and standing for truth, justice and righteousness can bring about conflict?

"Peace on earth, goodwill to man" must then be seen in the context of *shalom's* transcendent meaning.

Shalom must be the greater and higher good of any society, for it lies at the heart of God's desire to reconcile all people and all things to Himself. Only then are we at the state of a wholeness and completeness that goes beyond our human experience of peace.

So we aim towards the *shalom* of all men and women, irrespective of race or creed, so that all may prosper in the land. The freedom from poverty and from injustice, and the freedom of conscience, of worship and of self-determination are all part of this *shalom* when all facets and systems in life and society cohere together for the common good of all.

In the light of Visit Malaysia Year 2014, one must surely be captivated by the promotional video clips depicting Malaysia as a country of peace and beauty. Such depictions can either make us cynical, mindful of present realities, or fill us with the same aspiration that all of us share, whether Christian or not, for a nation that is peaceful and prosperous, a melting pot that we can truly call home.

This Christmas, let us then work for *shalom*. History shows us that such aspirations do not come easy. Peace requires work, pain and sacrifice. But as Scripture reminds us, "*for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matt 6:21; NIV).

Where then is our treasure? In the material things of this world or in the pursuit of God's sovereign will for truth, justice and righteousness as part of the peace on earth and goodwill to all?

May our Christmas this season be a truly meaningful and joyous one. God bless the church and Malaysia!

Announcements

- The NECF Tamil Commission approved a new fund for widows of Tamil pastors on 24 Sept 2013 and an amount of RM20,000 has been raised to date.
- There are vacancies in the NECF Secretariat for a Finance and Accounts officer and a General Worker. For further enquiries, or to submit your CV, please email enquiries@necf.org.my stating the post desired.

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By Rev. Eu Hong Seng



Do Not Fret

THE Court of Appeal's infamous judgment on 14 October 2013 brought unprecedented global criticism, utter disbelief amongst her citizenry and evoked the ire of respectable religious leaders, both Christian and non-Christian.

That same night as national Church leaders gathered to discern its implications, I was reminded of King David's plea in Psalm 37 - do not fret!

David reminds us to wait on Him, trust in Him and rest in Him.

I can think of five reasons why the Malaysian Church need not fret:

1 In setting aside the High Court judgment, the justices waded off the legal domain and entered and escalated the battle of the gods.

If they had stuck to the law, we the ordinary church folks could have been censured for being untutored in legal matters. But what made them emphatically state that "Allah" is not an integral part of our faith when "Allah" is in our Alkitab, when we have been using it before Independence and when it is similarly used by Christians in the most populous Muslim nation of the world, Indonesia, escapes logic.

On this score, the government lost in the court of world opinion.

The crisis in the Judiciary in 1998 appears somewhat mild compared to the consequential worldwide disdain and emergence of the new doctrine of "bodoh-ology."¹

2 The approach to this issue has been described by many as irrational. I would add, double-faced and schizophrenic.

How would one describe the move by JAKIM to issue a sermon asking Muslims to "take action" the Friday before the Court of Appeal's hearing on 10 Sept? And then on the day of the hearing itself, send the DPP to court to cry "possible public disorder." Aren't both JAKIM and the public prosecutor's office apparatuses under the same regime!

How can the same regime promote religious harmony with the 10-point solution and at the same time adamantly

proceed with the appeal against the High Court decision to allow the use of "Allah"?

Why is there not a word of rebuke or even "mild disagreement" against those who call on Christians who don't agree with the ban to emigrate, but yet simultaneously promote the global movement of the moderates on the world stage?

Such clear state-sponsored schizophrenia has not escaped the scrutiny of right-thinking people in the world. To date, the post judgment solutions in sight appear both phony and patchy.

3 A hammer has been used to kill a fly. The apparatus that has been brought to bear upon the Church is an over-kill.

Approximately 14,000 copies of The Herald are printed each month to cater for 1.6 million Catholics in the country. No insult intended to the Catholics, but the reality is many non-BM speaking Catholics and other Protestants have rarely made the effort to get their hands on a copy. I must confess, in my entire Christian life, I have only read one issue of The Herald. And the sale is by subscription! Hence, it's improbable that Muslims would rush to the newsstands to buy The Herald each time it is published, like Apple fans waiting in queue for the latest iPhone.

Clearly, there are those who enjoy making a big deal of small issues. When one apostatizes, Christians get blamed. When one Muslim strays into our premises, we can expect the over-zealous defenders of Allah at our door, and we better be prepared for a raid!

But what happens when 100,000s convert to Islam?? Absolutely NOTHING.

In the past, the government hints, and NGOs shout "sensitive". Now the judiciary officially puts on record Muslims' sensitivities. For those of us on the receiving end, what is new?

4 I have never seen so many Muslim NGOs and government agencies talk about my God and the Trinity. Even judges now consult Rev Google about "Allah".

Continued on next page...

...continued from page 3: Do Not Fret

To be clear, I don't agree with the exegesis, but I am happy about the conversations that have been initiated. The flipside to this divide is, we can be mature and study each other's faith without any condescension. Lately, some Muslim PhD students were found doing theses on Church matters. We welcome this.

But I don't think the answer lies in understanding each other theologically. Till Kingdom come, we will never agree on the Trinity. I don't think we can even agree if it's to be spelt with a capital "T" or just a "t." With so much mocking of the "name" (of God) and the Trinity – I would say to all the clerics and zealots: you like your teh "kosong", but I like my teh tarik, "3 in 1".

I am puzzled (not confused) as to how the nation can begin to advance towards developed nation status in 2020, when we do not appear to have the capacity to even respect each other's preferences and gods, and are blatant in tearing down temples, reclaim religious lands of other faiths and firebomb the houses of worship of gods whom we do not agree with.

5

A seminal moment is here.

In the 18 Oct 2013 issue of the NST, the UMNO election was described as a "seminal moment in UMNO's history". Besides the "ra-ra-ra", it was prophetically reported that the line-up could determine its "very survival"³.

I am neither anti-government nor pro-opposition but I am anti- anyone who advocates the rewriting of my Scriptures by restricting the use of "Allah". Every regime is ordained or "allowed" by God for a purpose. And it does seem that this will be a "seminal moment" in our country's history, not just UMNO's. If Allah is just "a god" (with a small "g"), then

let the fun continue. If He is indeed God (which I believe so), then He can certainly arise to deal with those who insult Him.

Instead of fist-shaking, why not poll and see which of our elected representatives are fence-sitters, god-nappers⁴, and who amongst them will not speak up for religious liberty. And then ask ourselves if we want ambivalent characters in our parliament and respective State assemblies. And that includes the opposition as well.

It is about time all people of all races, both East and West Malaysians, get angry over this circus. Our country is already becoming a laughing stock. If they dare mess with the Scriptures of a leading faith in the world, no one and nothing is exempt. Now that it has even been suggested that the Alkitab be banned, perhaps the only step that remains in this mindless episode is for someone to register a copyright: "Allah™".

There is no doubt this is an irrational, self-created and non-existent threat to Islam. My encouragement comes from Psalm 37: 12-13, that as "the wicked plots ... the Lord laughs at him."

What is being played out is not a mere clash of opinions, but for the Church, at its deepest level, it is truly a battle of the gods. And in every battle of our God versus gods, we are confident He will have His way.

For these reasons, I do not fret.

¹ As used by Zaid Ibrahim in his blog on 21st Oct 2013.

² Since Merdeka.

³ See pg 6, Oct 18th 2013 issue of NST

⁴ In my definition, one who kidnaps the God of another community by controlling the usage of the name of their God.



NECF Calendar 2014

JANUARY

11 Tamil Pastors' Consultation on Current Religious Issues in Malaysia

FEBRUARY

22 Tamil Commission Pastors' Prayer Shield Seminar, Klang Valley
25-27 BM Commission Pastor@2P "Pemulihan & Penyegaran" Seminar

MARCH

23-29 Nazirite Training by Jerome Ocampo
28-29 Eagles Leadership Conference on 'Leading Organisations'

MAY

1-3 BM Commission Mentor Generasi Muda retreat

JUNE

14 Tamil Commission Church Growth Seminar with Dudley Thangiah

JULY

13-15 BM Commission Jaringan Doa Nasional

SEPT

TBC Women's Commission Women Empowerment Conference

Equipping the Orang Asli Church

AT the Kem Yobel (Jubilee Camp) Orang Asli held in September, the indigenous Christians of Peninsular Malaysia gathered to worship, seek the Lord and to strategise for the growth of their church. Held in Bentong, the camp drew 850 Orang Asli from 17 tribes. Of the 19 tribes in Semenanjung Malaysian, 15 are considered the least reached.

Besides celebrating Malaysia's Jubilee year, it was also an opportunity to bring different OA ministries together to plan for more church planting and disciple-making, said Bro. Ann Wan Kuan, a member of the NECF Orang Asli Commission. Ann is also from Jubilee Ministry, which organised the camp with the NECF's support.

"We looked at the fact that the majority of the tribes are still considered to be the least-reached. The question is what should we do collectively to reach them. Our focus will be on church planting and disciple-making," he said.

Part of this strategy is to equip Orang Asli Christians to disciple their own people, and thus the camp's theme was about being sent by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Orang Asli believers led the worship and most of the programmes during the camp. This was important for leadership development in the indigenous church.

"We want to see and train more of the Orang Asli to take up the leadership responsibilities," Ann said.

It was also encouraging to see that about 70% of the camp participants were teenagers and young adults. There were also 150 children below the age of 14. Truly, the future of the church lies with the young.



Staking Their Lives for Their Land

A MIDST concerns that the “Allah” issue infringes on the religious freedom of East Malaysians, Bumiputera Christians in Sarawak are facing another struggle deep in the interior. It is the struggle for the right to land, livelihood and self-determination. The latest in this decades’ old struggle are the Baram Dam and Murum Dam blockades.



An excavator leaving the site of a blockade at Long Lama against the Baram dam.

Photo: Peter Kallang/SAVE Rivers.

The Baram blockade

Kayan, Kenyah and Penan natives are fighting plans for yet another dam which will displace up to 20,000 natives and submerge a rainforest area of over 400km².

Blockades at different locations were launched in Oct 2013, one, to stop construction of an access road, and the other, at the proposed dam site itself. Both blockades enjoyed success when workers left the area and took their heavy machinery and other equipment with them.

Points to note in the Baram case are: 1) The affected villages have not consented to the dam. 2) No social or environmental impact analysis (EIA) has been conducted on the proposed site, and yet, road works and surveys at the site have started. 3) Nothing about the project, resettlement and compensation has been discussed with the affected natives.

On 6 Nov, two Baram villages, Long Na'ah and Long Kesseh, sued the Chief Minister and State Government at the Miri High Court. They are claiming rights over 4000 ha of their land which will be submerged by the dam. They

are also challenging the constitutionality of provisions in the Sarawak Land Code on the grounds that land, being their source of life, cannot be taken away by such laws.

The Murum blockade

The wall of the Murum Dam was recently completed and impoundment began on 21 Sept. It has displaced about 1500 Penan natives. To date, three affected villages have resettled in Tegulang.

However, the affected Penan natives tell a different story: 1) That the first two years of the dam's construction was carried out in secret. 2) That the EIA report was not disclosed until the dam had reached an advanced stage of construction. 3) The villagers who resettled in Tegulang had no choice as their original homes would inevitably be submerged. 4) The compensation offered and living conditions at Tegulang are atrociously sub-par. There are no farmlands and forest to grow and hunt food. There is no clinic and waste disposal system.

The Penans have launched blockades since Sept 2012. The latest blockade began in September this year and still



Penans at the Murum blockade.

Photo: Joe Lamb

The Murum Dam

continues. With their land already lost to the impoundment, they are now protesting the terms and amount of compensation, and to stop materials from coming in to complete the dam's turbines and powerhouse.

On 7 Nov, 10 Penan protestors were arrested for blockading. They include two under-aged boys. All 10 were released after three days but will be charged with wrongful restraint and criminal trespass.

A critical juncture

The blockades against both dams continue and are manned by the natives numbering up to several hundred strong on some days. They include whole families; women, children and the elderly. They live in makeshift tents and occasionally receive food, drinking water and medicines supplied by groups of concerned Malaysians and some NGOs. Long-term exposure to the elements and lack of nutritious food has caused some of them to fall sick. At times, police have stopped humanitarian aid from reaching the blockade sites. Natives have also reported harassment and use of force against peaceful protestors.

Many among the tribes currently affected – the Penan, Kenyah and Kayan – are Christians, and so are the lawyers and the NGO leaders helping them. These NGOs include the Sarawak Indigenous Lawyers Alliance, SAVE Rivers, Borneo Resources Institute (BRIMAS) and the Society for Rights of Indigenous People Sarawak (SCRIPS). They are asking for prayer and support to cover the cost of food, aid and transportation to reach the interior and to help lawyers prepare legal cases.

As far as the natives are concerned, they will continue to hold their ground. But for how long? The state government plans to build a total of 12 hydroelectric dams for industrial parks under the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) project. The first of these, the Bakun Dam, has already displaced 10,000 natives. The Baram and Murum blockades are thus appealing for help at a critical juncture that may determine whether more dams will be built and more natives displaced.

Article sources: News reports and personal communications with lawyers and NGO leaders.

Making Disciples for the Public Sphere

By Larry Lee and Debbie Loh

IN 2010, as the NECF Youth Commission thought through the topic of youth discipleship, we observed that churches by and large, seemed to struggle with holistic discipleship. There was plenty of emphasis on personal spiritual development, but not much on discipleship in the context of nation-building.

As Darrow Miller observed on the execution of the Great Commission, making disciples of all nations has largely been limited to saving souls and planting churches. Evangelism “frequently addresses only the soul...it doesn’t teach people how to live for Christ. Yet that is what it means to disciple nations.”¹

Miller observed that evangelical Christians who disciplined others taught them how to pray, do Bible study, worship, fellowship and serve. The focus, however, was on personal spirituality while responsibility was largely limited to the self.

Miller wrote this in 1997. More recently, Luis Sena reflected on the “low effectiveness of local churches to transform their communities and cities in spite of the high number of churches and the multitude of people that go to church every week.”²

Sena continues: “I think the reason for such low impact is that most churches are not discipling their members nor discipling the ‘culture’ of their members. That is, they are not providing a biblical framework to the various cultural practices which are influencing their members.”

This brings us to the question of worldview. Relying on either evangelism or personal spirituality alone does not bring out the fullness of the Gospel and of the Great Commission in its entirety. We forget the rest of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20, “...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” This means bringing the values and principles of God’s Kingdom into the social order of the nation, its institutions and spheres.

Biblical worldview

Miller argues that to make disciples of all nations echoes the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12: 1-3, where God says, “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Therefore, Christians, whether as individuals or as a church, are called to live as witnesses, as instruments of Gospel proclamation, and to seek the welfare and common good of society and the nation.

Are churches preparing their youths for this?

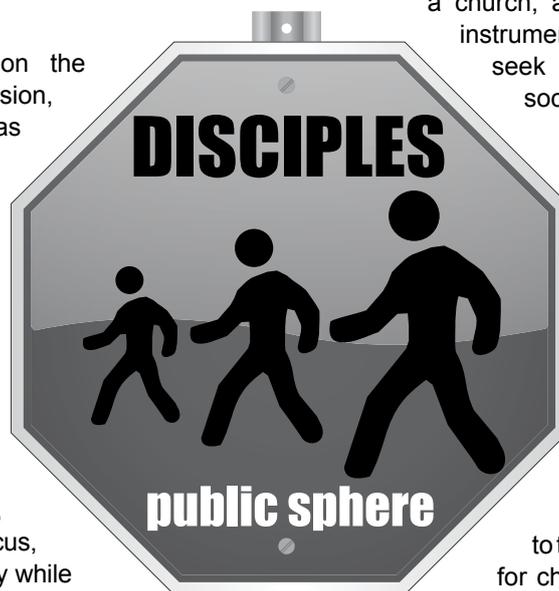
One observation is that local churches tend to lack intentional preparation of youths to contribute significantly to the nation via the marketplace.

It is more common to find youth ministries geared towards personal spiritual development and to the replenishing of manpower needed for church-centric ministries (e.g. serving on the Worship team or Multimedia Ministry).

Less attention is given towards preparing youths to make transitions in life and to navigating challenges as they build their careers. Youths need help in identifying and discerning a possible calling to serve in one of the spheres of society, be it politics, the media, science, education, business or others. Most times, the issue of calling or vocation is addressed by way of one-off career talks.

One potential consequence of this is that young adults may continue to live in the blindspot where the “sacred” (church and spirituality) is not integrated with the “secular” (vocation or career). When time and money are at stake, plus the eventual pressures of building a home and family, youths may tend to prioritise their careers and earnings while leaving church life or ministry for later, like “when the family is more stable”.

Where youth ministries and churches do emphasise nation-building and influencing society, there may still be a lack of biblical worldview to equip youths as agents of change. Pulpit preaching and the testimonies of



Christians with successful marketplace ministries do well to inspire youths, but youths who want to live out a calling in “secular” arenas will still need spiritual mentoring for the rest of their journey. This brings to mind, more so in the light of the last two Malaysian general elections which saw a number of Christian young adults joining the political arena, the importance of continuing discipleship.

Consequences for the church

Is there a connection between this lack of preparation for life and vocation among youths, and the dropout rate among young adults in church? How many young adults do you know of who stopped attending church after completing tertiary education or after beginning their careers?

A 2008 survey by LifeWay Research among U.S. churches found an 80% chance that a church-going teenager would stop attending church as a young adult. In Malaysia, no formal survey has been done but we see clues in the churches that have larger numbers in their Children’s Ministry and fewer heads in their young adults groups. And it is not uncommon that senior pastors and ministry leaders have difficulty finding successors to mentor and pass the baton to.

*There is an 80% chance
that a church-going teenager
would stop attending church
as a young adult.
(as reported by LifeWay Research,
a 2008 survey among U.S. churches)*

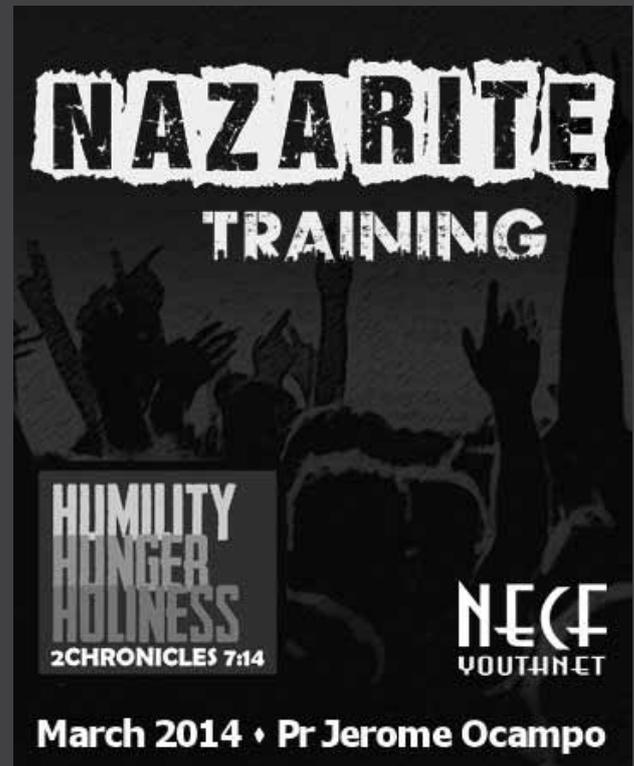
What this suggests, at the very least, is that to keep our young people in church and to keep the church’s salt and light useful and functioning in society, much more needs to be done beyond discipleship in personal spirituality and evangelism. We need to help our youths develop character, give them a broader vision of the Kingdom and give them a biblical worldview that makes their faith and life in Christ relevant to the needs of society and the world.

Organised by NECF YouthNet, the Nazarite training aims to equip young people with character and lifestyle foundations necessary to lead and serve in all the spheres of influence in culture and society.

¹ Miller, Darrow L. *Worldview Development and Discipling the Nations. International Journal of Frontier Missions, Vol 14:2 Apr-June 1997.*

² Sena, Luis. *Why The Church is Not Discipling the Nation. Paper presented at the DNA Global Forum, Brazil, 12 March 2013. Taken from www.disciplenations.org*

Nazarite Training



THE Nazarite vow in Numbers 6 is a vow to separate oneself from the world and to consecrate his or her person as holy unto God.

A Jewish man or woman in biblical times could take up this vow by swearing an oath to God, abstain from drinking any wine or intoxicating liquid and from eating anything derived from grapes, let their hair grow long for the duration of the vow, and remain ritually clean by avoiding contact with any corpse.

These symbolic acts of staying separate and consecrated to God have been fleshed out in the principles of Humility, Hunger and Holiness under the Nazarite Training programme, developed by Pastor Jerome Ocampo from the Philippines and founder of the Jesus Revolution Now!

This intensive training programme is coming to Malaysia from 23-29 March 2014 as part of the NECF YouthNet’s vision to see youths rising up to be agents of change and blessing in the nation. Check out the programme and registration details at the NECF website by clicking on a thumbnail image of the poster.

DIFFERENT POSITIONS ON THE COA JUDGMENT:

With respect to the court ruling it only applies to The Herald paper, which has got wide circulation, and doesn't apply to the situation in Sabah and Sarawak. So what we're trying to do objectively above all is to ensure stability and national harmony.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak

I am aware that the ruling is only applicable to The Herald case. ...This means those who are in Sabah and Sarawak are still free to use that "Allah" word.

Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department

It boils down to freedom of non-Muslims to practice their faith and any decision under the Federal Constitution binds all, irrespective of state and region ... So, there cannot be exemptions given to Sabah and Sarawak on this religious issue based on region or state.

Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman, former Attorney-General of Malaysia

[By deciding that Allah was banned in The Herald because the word was not an integral part of Christians in their worship] simply means that the ruling covers all Christians.

Edmund Bon, lawyer

The thrust of the decision is that where national security and public order are concerned, the Minister has the discretion to ban any word which is prejudicial or likely to be prejudicial to national security and public order. As long as the discretion is exercised legally, reasonably, rationally and proportionally, the court will not interfere with the Minister's exercise of discretion in these matters.

Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail, Attorney-General of Malaysia

There appears to be no basis for the findings by the Court of Appeal that the word is not an integral part of the faith or practice of Christianity other than what has been described in the written judgments as "a quick research" and research conducted on the internet.In any event, it is for a party asserting exclusive rights to the use of the word 'Allah' to establish that they have such exclusive rights, rather than for others to have to establish that the use of the word is integral to their faith. ...It is difficult to discern how we are able to declare exclusivity of a word over which we do not have proprietary rights.

Christopher Leong, President, Malaysian Bar, Press Release, 16 Oct 2013

WHAT SOME MUSLIM SCHOLARS AND WRITERS SAY:

The Malaysian ban follows a depressingly familiar pattern of using religion as a pretext for promoting the status of the majority ethnic group and thereby monopolising the national character.

Nesrine Malik, The Malaysian 'Allah' ban is about putting minorities in their place, The Guardian, 16 Oct 2013

The Malaysian decision overlooks not merely the theology, but also the etymology of the word. The word "Allah" is derived from the Arabic "al-ilah", the god. It's found its way across the world and entered Malay from Arabic.

Editorial: Word 'Allah' is not exclusive to Islam, The National, 14 Oct 2013 (United Arab Emirates)

Allah is a construction of the word 'al-Ilah' ... 'Al-Ilah' means 'The God'. Allah is not the name of God. ...That you can control people's ideas, their behaviour, their faith and their minds simply by trying to control the words that they use, is absurd.

Reza Azlan, author and academic

Muslims have no copyright over the word Allah. In fact, there's nothing in the Quran that says Allah can only be used by Muslims...It isn't right to define the word Allah in the law and use it to persecute others.

Dr Jasser Auda, Deputy Director of the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics; founding member, International Union for Muslim Scholars

Why do we get emotional when others use the word #Allah ...It is because of an inferiority complex that the word #Allah is monopolized.

Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Oxford University, on Twitter, 2 Nov 2013

...continued from page 11: After the COA judgment on 'Allah'

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE:

It is not about Muslims having more rights under the Federal Constitution than believers of other faiths, but it is about Islam having been accepted as the religion of the Federation, being placed at a higher position than any other religion under the constitution.

Haniff Khatri Abdulla, lawyer representing the six state Islamic councils in The Herald case

The court's refusal to see whether the home minister was fair or just, means he now has a free hand in regulating other religions.

Jagir Singh, lawyer and President of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST)



Church Missions and the Indian Community

THE recent *Ops Cantas* by the police to crack down on secret societies once again highlighted the fact that many of those involved in gangs come from the Indian community.

In a paper “Indian Gangsterism: A Brief Introduction”, Pastor Gabriel Jabanathan who heads the NECF Tamil Commission, collated statistics and news reports to update Tamil churches on the issue and to call for action. He presented his paper at the One Prayer Youth Conference on 22 Sept 2013 at FGA KL and also tabled his paper to the NECF Tamil Commission.

Police statistics reported by the media show that 5,505 people were arrested in the first three weeks of *Ops Cantas*. Police also listed 49 gangs with a total membership of 40,313, with over half of them being Indian. Their crimes included armed robbery, theft, vehicle theft, extortion and narcotics. Overall, Indians comprised 70% of those in gangs, Chinese 25% and Malays 4.7%. Past statistics also show that while the Emergency Ordinance was still in effect, 63% of those detained under this law were reportedly Indians.

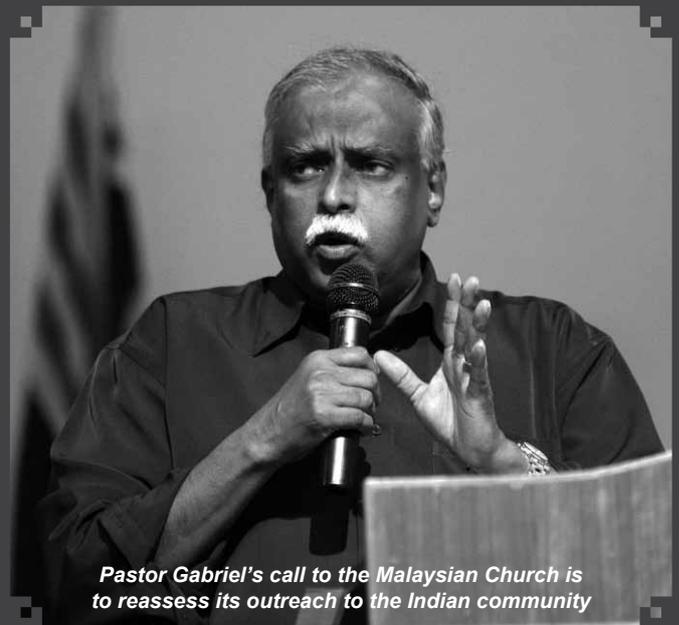
There is no denying that the Indian community is vulnerable to gangsterism, with even cabinet ministers and Indian political party leaders admitting it.

The solutions, however, go beyond policing. The vulnerability of the Indian community is closely linked to larger and inter-connected socio-economic factors. In many other unfortunate areas, the community has the highest rates for mortality, school dropouts, alcoholism, drug use, criminal convictions, suicide and begging – relative to its population size. They also score the lowest in life expectancy. In terms of economic equity, Indians are still below 3% with the bulk of wealth held by elite businessmen.

In schools, poor performing students risk being ignored by teachers, are labelled as problematic and as low achievers. This perpetuates a cycle of stereotyping, alienation, poor grades and delinquency.

Poverty, as Pastor Gabriel puts it, is the “seed-bed for gangsterism”. Secondary schools have become recruitment grounds and a “supply” for potential gangs.

The roots of poverty and social deprivation lie in urbanisation and industrialisation policies which saw many rural Indians migrate to urban centres, and those working



Pastor Gabriel's call to the Malaysian Church is to reassess its outreach to the Indian community

in plantations to move to towns after the plantations were acquired for development. Faced with a lack of options, many ended up in slums and in low-skilled, low-paying jobs.

While the social problems afflicting the Indian community are clearly interwoven with poverty, the authorities' response has so far been largely punitive, for example, police have declared a “war” on gangs and secret societies.

How can the Malaysian Church respond? Pastor Gabriel highlighted four areas for the Church:

- Critically re-evaluate missions to Indians – where has the Church failed?
- Prioritise slum ministry – have we long ignored those in the slums of our own city?
- Secondary school ministry – are we reaching Indian students in secondary schools? Are Christian young people taught to reach out to Indian students in their schools?
- Educational support – can the Church do more to help with poor pupils and slum children through tuition programmes and other means?

While it is the Tamil Commission that has raised this issue, it is by no means for Tamil churches to labour alone. Can the churches of other language groups, particularly the resource-rich ones, see themselves as partners in reaching out to fellow Malaysians long neglected?



NECF Staff Retreat

The secretariat staff enjoyed a 3-day retreat at the OMF Bungalow in Cameron Highlands where we ate, played, worshipped, watched movies and reflected on the way forward for NECF.



Support Full-Time Workers through the NECF Foundation and Group Insurance Scheme

THE NECF Foundation was launched in 2004 and the following year, a group insurance scheme was initiated for full-time workers. The scheme, known as the NECF-Great Eastern Life Group Multiple Benefits Insurance Scheme (GMBIS), provides a comprehensive insurance coverage at low cost.

The scheme is open to all pastors, church workers, church members, their spouses and children who worship in churches under the NECF umbrella. It is also open to associate members of NECF and employees of para-churches or organisations as long as they are members of NECF.

For a premium of RM30.00 per month, participants can enjoy the following benefits:

- Critical Illness coverage of RM30,000 or
- Natural death coverage of RM30,000 or
- Accidental death coverage of RM60,000 or
- Total & Permanent Disablement (due to illness) of RM30,000 or
- Total & Permanent Disablement (due to accident) of RM60,000.
- Bereavement (death claim) benefit of RM2,000 & maturity benefits at age 65 if there has been no claim.

The maximum amount that can be taken is RM250,000 inclusive of other such group schemes with Great Eastern Life. Participants must be below 55 years of age and for children 1 month old. All cases will be subject to underwriting.

Since the commencement of the scheme till December 2012, the number of cases claimed are 29 and the total amount paid out is RM1,229,589.

Those who qualify for the scheme according to the criteria mentioned earlier and who wish to participate or obtain further information, please contact: Lawrence (019-3382 687), Laura (013-3367 088), Sharon (012-6596 216) or the office (03-4294 7673).

You can also donate funds to help the Foundation sponsor the premium for full-time workers who cannot afford the full amount. As shown in the Foundation's report for 2012, we provide 50% subsidy for insurance coverage for nearly 300 pastors from East Malaysia.

In addition to subsidising insurance premiums, the Foundations also provides welfare support and education loans. Our ability to provide such assistance relies on donations. For 2012, the amount received was RM88,389 compared to the RM181,801 received in 2011.

The Foundation thanks those who have faithfully and generously donation to ensure "that those who preach the gospel receive their living from the gospel" (1 Cor 9:14).

NECF Foundation Report for 2012

EXPENDITURE

1. Welfare assistance

For the year 2012, RM17,000 in financial welfare assistance was rendered to three Pastors.

2. Subsidy towards Insurance for East Malaysian Pastors

We continue to provide the 50% subsidy towards Personal Accident & Critical Illness insurance coverage for 296 Pastors from Sarawak and Sabah. The insurance premium subsidy amounted to RM52,740 for the year 2012. This is the Group Multiple Benefits Insurance Scheme specially designed for NECF Foundation.

3. Study Loans

As at year end 2012, the Foundation has given out 25 interest-free study loans amounting to RM351,472. Total repayments received as at December 2012 was RM119,338. In 2012 one new study loan of RM15,670 were approved and the loan was disbursed in 2012. Efforts were taken to encourage those who were slow in repaying their loans to keep to the agreed repayment schedule. Failure to repay on a timely basis will affect the amount available for new loans.

INCOME

1. Donations received

Praise the Lord! Donations received for the year amounted to RM88,389.

OTHERS

1. Great Eastern Life Assurance

Since the Great Eastern insurance scheme started in September 2005, there has been 24 insurance claims totaling RM1,229,589 as at 31 December 2012. In the year 2012 there were five claims totaling RM202,507. As at 31/12/12 we have 1,847 members under the Group Scheme.

2. New Loan Category

The Lord had provided graciously, paving the way for the Foundation to provide another loan category, namely the Vocational Education Loan. This interest free loan is available to children of pastors and full time workers to pursue vocational skill training: eg. nurse, mechanic, electrician, culinary skills, etc.

To God be the glory, great things He has done!!!



Looking Out Looking Up

THE PHILIPPINES Excerpts from a letter by a Philippine church leader in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan: "Our Lord is sovereign overall...this is an opportunity to show our spirit of unity, deep faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and demonstrate our selfless giving. We have not seen in our history such a generous outpouring of aid and supplies from within the country (through the private sector) and from countries around the world... [for] our national, regional and local government officials, ...pray that the Lord will give them the mind of Joseph who knew how to direct the people when the seven years of famine struck Egypt."

 **PRAY for** – the authorities and response teams to have wisdom, steadfastness, keen insight and quickness in organizing rescue, relief and rehabilitation. That aid will be widely distributed to all and not just some affected areas. An end to looting, robberies and other desperate acts. Unwavering faith for Filipino Christians to be beacons of light. Miracles of healing and provision so that many will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. That restoration and rehabilitation work be successfully completed, to the glory of God. – IPC

NORTH KOREA About 80 people were publicly executed in different cities in early November, South Korean media and internal unnamed sources say. They were executed for various crimes that include watching South Korean movies and possessing the Bible. The executions were done by shooting and people were made to watch. In one city, people were reportedly packed into a stadium and forced to watch as the victims were machine-gunned. North Koreans are forced to subscribe to an ideology that mixes Marxism with worship of the country's founder, Kim Il Sung, and his descendants.

 **PRAY** – Praise God for the faith of Christians in North Korea. Pray that they will

be able to share the good news with trusted friends and family. Pray that NGOs will feel burdened to serve in North Korea. Pray for the safety and effective witness of Christian NGOs in the country. Pray that Kim Jong Un would discover the reality of the true God. Pray that he will care and work for the good of the North Korean citizens. – OMF

UNITED NATIONS The United Nations International Prayer Initiative was held in November at the United Nations in New York City. It brought together prayer leaders, youth and children from around the world to pray with UN officials, ambassadors and global Christian organisations. In the past, similar initiatives held at the UN saw breakthroughs in the form of peace and reconciliation between former enemies.

 **PRAY** – for God to move among His people working at the UN and in international diplomacy. Pray that the work conducted by the UN in poverty eradication, aid, development, healthcare and conflict resolution will be effective in the healing of nations. Pray for divine wisdom and authority for those who work in the area of international relations and politics to be instruments of peace. – IPC

SYRIA Since the civil war began in March 2011, more than 100,000 people have been killed in Syria and 4 million have been displaced from their homes. Many are in need of aid but aid agencies cannot reach them due to ongoing fighting. An estimated 2 million have fled the country as refugees. For those left behind, winter is coming and the cold will only make things worse. Meanwhile, the diplomatic process towards a peaceful solution is underway through the Geneva II peace conference, but the process is made difficult for as long the Syrian government troops and the rebel forces continue to fight on the ground.

 **PRAY** – Pray for a change of heart in all parties so that each side will agree to lay down arms and come to the negotiating table. Ask God to pour His rich mercies on those suffering. Pray for wisdom and vision for church leaders to guide believers. As the Syrian Church experiences oneness in the suffering of Christ, pray that she will be empowered to be active in relief work and speak the Word of God in boldness. – Tearfund, OD

PAKISTAN On 22 Sept 2013, suicide bombers walked into the All Saints Church in Peshawar and blew themselves up along with worshippers inside who were partaking of a fellowship meal following their Sunday service. Media reports say about 80 people were killed and over 120 people injured, but information from locals put the death toll at more than 100 people. A local Taliban-affiliated group, the Jinad Ullah, have claimed responsibility. Their stated mission is to continue striking foreigners and non-Muslim targets until the US stops its drone strikes on Taliban and Al-Qaeda targets. Following the suicide bombing, Christians held country-wide demonstrations.

 **PRAY** – Pray for God's protection over the Church in Pakistan, and for wisdom, courage, unity and faith among believers to respond in Christ-likeness. Pray that the government will be able to bring to justice the perpetrators behind this attack as well as many other attacks against Christians. Pray for continued safety as more threats have been made. – WEA, IPC, WPA

THE PASHTUN PEOPLE Pashtuns are the largest people group in Afghanistan at about 42%. They are also the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan, which shares a border with Afghanistan. There are very few Christians among them. The Pashtun have close links with the Taliban, although many do not agree with militant Islam. The Pashtun have a long history dating back to times before the birth of Christ and are known as a tribe that has never been colonized. They are famous for "Pashtunwali", their tribal code which upholds independence, honour, justice, loyalty, equality and love among many other virtues. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US support of mujahideen fighters against Russia were among the factors that saw the Pashtun lose their heritage to militant forms of Islam. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border area where they reside is now a hotbed of militancy. Some analysts believe that the key to the Taliban's undoing lies with the revitalization of the Pashtun people.

 **PRAY** – for those working to reach the Pashtun with the Gospel. Pray that God will reveal salvation to them. Pray that they will be united in rejecting militant ideologies. Pray that the Pashtun will rise to reclaim their heritage. Pray for wise and godly leaders among them to lead the people. – IPC, OM