

EDITORIAL

A place for everything & Everything in its place

It was fabulous. No Malaysian, no matter how unpatriotic, would have failed to feel a tingle of pride at being a Malaysian after watching the recent National Day parade. The 49th Merdeka celebration reminded us once again of the glory of Malaysian society – a multiracial, multicultural and multireligious society.

The traditional dances in the Kuching extravaganza on Merdeka eve further underlined the fact that Malaysia is a melting pot of different tribes and tongues.

In a special message aired over radio and television, the Prime Minister said, “The solidarity of Malaysians is our

strength, we need to ensure that we maintain that strength. A good consensus, a strong and effective cooperation, these are important.”

We agree wholeheartedly. But let’s face it. After almost 50 years of nationhood, the racial and religious polarisation in the country is greater than ever. Ethnic and religious groups tend to identify themselves first with their respective groups and not as Malaysians.

The issue is even more burning for Christians who are called to be a distinct people, the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

How are we to respond?

A Tale of Two Cities

We feel this tension because of our dual citizenship – in the heavenly City of God and the earthly one of Malaysia. So, it should follow that “it is the best of times” and “it the worst of times” (Charles Dickens’ Tale of Two Cities)!

It will be the worst of times if we do not resolve the issues and continue to be mired in confusion. We end up separating our lives into two compartments. From Monday to Saturday, we work and play as “secret Christians”.

On Sunday, we mouth grand



declarations and prayers for the salvation of the world and the nation.

The two compartments are separate – except that we scurry to “build bridges” in the run-up to our church’s Easter or Christmas evangelistic project.

In short, we are embarrassed to proclaim Christ when pluralism and “respect for other religions” is the ideology of the age while we secretly (and sincerely) hope for God’s Kingdom to come. Does this explain why some Christians are so caught up with the Lina Joy case (for example), in which a victory will prompt the feeling that the Kingdom of God is nearer, but dare not walk across the street to reach out to their neighbours?

It will be the best of times, however, if we perceive religious pluralism as a rare opportunity. Perhaps the first step is to accept pluralism not as an ideology but simply as a fact.

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Printed by Akitiara Corporation
1 & 3, Jln TPP1/3, Tmn Industri Puchong
Batu 12, 47100 Puchong, Selangor

From The Chairman

Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Go on and get busy



THE next 12 months will be exciting times as our nation gears up to celebrate its 50th Merdeka Day. Similarly, NECF Malaysia will also be making preparations to celebrate our 25th anniversary next July.

In the midst of the anticipation of the double celebrations next year, the Lina Joy case continues to preoccupy many of our minds and prayer agenda of the Church. The case is indeed crucial.

However, we, the Church must not miss out on what is equally, if not, the more important agenda of the Church – nation building.

Let us learn from history. When God's people were under the Babylonian captivity, it took 70 years before the Persians came onto the scene. Thereafter, some of the people of God were able to return and re-build the Temple. Until the fulfillment of that time ordained by God, all that the people could do was cry by the rivers of Babylon.

Likewise, we cannot run ahead of God's timetable for our nation.

Whatever the outcome of the Lina Joy court case, I believe religious freedom will be affected.

In fact, even while the three judges are deliberating her case, our Prime Minister on Aug 21 called on the Federal Territory, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak to legislate laws to prevent other faiths from spreading their beliefs to Muslims.

But let's not forget what God's Word says – the Message Bible in **Romans 8:3b** aptly describes 'law' as being only as effective as a 'band-aid', incapable of providing 'deep healing'.

The Church should therefore look beyond the political and legal solutions. We need a spiritual solution – "deep

healing" for our nation.

The world at large will continue to contend that the Lina Joy case is a 'human rights' issue, while "the majority" today disagrees.

However, irrespective of one's perspective, we cannot run ahead of God's timetable. It is going to take time. And for us Christians, we need to be patient and continue to pray.

I am reminded of how, after the beheading of John the Baptist, Jesus went

on to do good works and preach the coming of the Kingdom. Likewise, the Church should emulate His footsteps.

The Church need not be despondent if the outcome of the Lina

Joy case is not favorable. We need to continue to do good works in our nation.

Our country needs to hear and know that we love our country and are willing to invest in it. We need to focus and work on nation building, which, I believe, is an agenda close to the Lord's heart.

NECF's "Nation-Building Policy" is currently being studied in greater depth. When completed, it will be presented to our members at large for endorsement and participation.

In the meantime, let the light of God, which is within us, shine forth.

I want to be in the place where others would be able to recognise our God in us, just like how Abimelech and Phicol acknowledged Abraham and said to him, "God is with you in all that you do" (Genesis 21:22 NKJV).

Let not the present crisis in our country distract us from focusing on the long-term goal – to do good works as espoused in our nation-building goal, and as commanded in the Scriptures. 



Needy Children Gain From Fast

A TOTAL of 1,600 needy children throughout West and East Malaysia will receive cash aid amounting to RM376,000 from the 2005 NECF Malaysia 40-day Fast & Prayer and Charity Fund.

The children were nominated by churches whose pastors are members of the pastors fellowship in their locality. This is for accountability purpose and also to link the churches to their communities.

The aid, ranging from RM150 to RM1,500 per child, will help to pay for the children's educational, nutritional or medical expenses. To avoid abuse of the funds, churches which nominated the children will supervise and follow up on the children's welfare.

NECF is presenting the money in stages with the first batch of children from the northern peninsula. In August, NECF handed out the cash aid to



Some of the 28 needy children and their parents from Alor Star who benefited from the 2005 NECF Malaysia 40-day Fast & Prayer and Charity Fund. The money was distributed at a simple ceremony at Trinity Baptist Church, Alor Star (TBC). On the far right is NECF Executive Secretary (Church Relations) Rev. Lai Moo Him while TBC Pr Penny Khor is third from the right.

children in Penang, Seberang Prai, Sungai Petani and Alor Star.

Last year, NECF gave away the entire 2004 Charity Fund to improve the quality of education in our nation. Thirty-three schools benefited from the fund. Last October, RM100,000 from the 2005 Charity Fund was given to help the earthquake victims in Pakistan. ▲

Dental Implantologist on Foundation Panel

A DENTIST specialising in dental implantology has joined the NECF Foundation specialist panel.

DR CHOW KAI FOO of Zhou Specialist Dental Surgery in Kuala Lumpur offers free consultation and up to 50 percent discount on treatment for full-time workers and their family members for general dental treatment and dental implants.

Dental implants are artificial teeth that are implanted. Unlike dentures which are mobile, dental implants are fixed. Hence, they look, feel and function like natural teeth.

Those who require his services may contact Rev. Lai Moo Him of NECF Malaysia to get a letter of reference. ▲

•FROM FRONT COVER

Pluralism is a fact because 60.4% of Malaysia's population are Muslims, 19.2% are Buddhists, 9.1% are Christians, 6.3% are Hindus, 2.6% follow a traditional Chinese religion and remaining 2.4% follow one of the lesser-known religions.

Pluralism is not an ideology (for us) because we do not believe that all religions are the same or all paths lead to God. However, the fact that pluralism exists necessitates a secular society.

A secular society is a neutral concept. It is not for or against God. It is simply a vehicle that allows the adherents of different religions to live together in peace and harmony.

And within this context, adherents of a religion are allowed to profess, practice and even propagate their faith.

A theocratic system, as some are calling for it, is not a practical option unless there is great homogeneity in the religions of a nation. As far as the New Testament faith is concerned, this is a non-issue.

Jesus said of Himself: "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) He said of His disciples: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." (John 17:16)

The New Covenant is primarily spiritual (with physical manifestations, no doubt). Recently there was an article in *The Star* alleging that the weakness of the Christian religion in relation to the State gave rise to religious pluralism.

While the argument has been refuted by a Christian writer, it must be added that the so-called weakness is ultimately a great strength. The Christian faith is "strong" because its spread is not dependent on political structure or legal sanction.

Knowledge of the broad sweep of history – world, national and salvation history – enables us to appreciate the rare opportunity that is before us. For when we see a place for everything, then we see everything in its place. Including our



own place and calling.

Some are called to fight for religious freedom in the courts in Malaysia. Others are called to focus on evangelism. Still others are called to social work as a witness for Christ. The main trouble is therefore not religious pluralism but Christians uncertain of their calling. It is time we seek the Lord for clarity, for singular purpose in our plural society.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Jesus Christ was crucified *keranamu*, Malaysia. His blood was spilled on Calvary.

Are we willing to "spill our blood" for *tanah tumpahnya darahku*? ▲

High Tide for the Kids

THE prayer wave in Malaysia is sweeping our children, judging from the two children conferences in Petaling Jaya (PJ) and Johor Baru (JB) held in August as part of the NECF Malaysia 40-day National Fast and Pray programme.

The two-day conference in PJ was a rip-roaring event for the nearly 700 children from over 100 churches nationwide at the PJEFC sanctuary.

The worship sessions got the kids singing and thumping tirelessly; the games provoked much shouting and cheering, while the speaker, Pr Sam Phun, drew a strange mix of side-splitting laughter and spontaneous outburst of tears with his messages on God's destiny for the children.

But most importantly was the children's intimate encounter with God as the Holy Spirit convicted them of their sins and ministered healing to their emotions.

Most of the children responded to the altar call at the end of the first day and the front of the sanctuary was a scene of emotional chaos as the children wept in conviction of their sins.

Children as young as six were weeping over, what they later described, the "bad things" they had done. James Lim admitted he cried over his many sins.

When asked how he could have "many sins" when he's only nine, he replied, "I have many sins. Sometimes when I get angry with certain people, I feel like killing them. That's wrong."

For some children who had hidden inner fears, God ministered to them by revealing to them their secrets. One Std 5 girl cried intensely without knowing exactly why but as the Holy Spirit



Passionate in prayer and praise...snapshots of the PJ Children Conference. - Pix by Sonya Chua

It was a truly touching moment and proof that children could rise to the occasion if given the opportunity and proper training.

The one-day Johor Baru conference, held after the PJ conference, also featured Pr Sam as the speaker. Some 320 children from 16 churches were taught to live up to their God-given destiny and calling.

Again, God moved powerfully among the

children, and like the PJ conference, the altar call scene was an emotional, tearful sight.

One father, George Neo, commented: "You should have told us to bring tissues. I asked my daughter, Philia, 7, about the conference. She told me the speaker made her laugh a great deal and also made her cry."

Looks like the movement to mobilise children to intercede for the country has kicked off to high gear. ▲

ministered to her, she realised she was terrified that her parents would divorce.

At the conference, the children learned to pray beyond their personal needs – such as exams and personal desires (toys, holidays gadgets, etc.) – and instead, interceded for the country.

The conference ended with a prayer rally when many children willingly climbed the stage, took the microphones and vocalised their simple prayers for the country.

Fast Move for College Students



OVER 150 students from various colleges representing over 17 churches converged at ACTS Church, Subang Jaya, on Aug 12 for a fast and prayer gathering in conjunction with the NECF Malaysia 40-day national fast and prayer.

Organised by the Asian Youth Ambassadors (AYA), the "AYA One-Day Big Break Fast" raised about RM1,900 for the 2006 NECF 40-day Fast & Pray & Charity Fund.

At the one-day fast, the students feasted on inspirational messages aimed at motivating them to pray and fast for the country, and developing intimacy with God.

In addition, they received study tips from seasoned lecturers, and broke fast together with a sumptuous dinner provided by the organiser. ▲

Malaysian Evangelicals Give To Lebanese war victims



Left to right: Rev. Wong, NECF Treasurer Dr Khoo Kay Hup, NECF Chairman Rev. Eu Hong Seng and NST Group Editor Brendan Pereira.

NECF MALAYSIA contributed RM100,000 to the New Straits Times' Lebanon Fund in August to help the victims of the Israel-Lebanon war.

The money was drawn from the 2005 40-day Prayer and Fast and Charity Fund. In presenting the cheque, NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong said, "People can be a little sectarian in their approach and philosophy, but we should help anybody in need. This is especially true in the multi-racial Malaysian context."

"Giving to the suffering should transcend colour, creed and race, for everyone is God's creation and equally loved by Him," NECF said in its press statement which also expressed Malaysian evangelicals' deep sorrow over the war which has caused many deaths. ▲

Stronger Voice in the UN for the Persecuted Church



THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE (WEA) in partnership with the Swiss Evangelical Alliance (l'Alliance évangélique suisse) opened a new office in Geneva, Switzerland in early August as part of its long-term efforts to strengthen the voice of the Persecuted Church and to influence world leaders in the neighbouring United Nations.

"In a day of growing global complexities, it is critical that WEA increases its impact on the global stage," said Geoff Tunnicliffe, International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Janet Epp Buckingham, Director of Law and Public Policy at the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, said the new office is strategically located to make the greatest impact on human rights advocacy.

"With the new Human Rights Council meeting three times a year, Geneva is clearly the meeting place for dealing with issues of human rights," said Buckingham.

"This office will be the focal point for WEA's advocacy for religious freedom around the world."

Johan Candelin, executive director of the WEA Religious Freedom

Commission, commented, "As WEA is taking its work to a higher level at the United Nations in New York and in Geneva with the Human Rights Council, the new WEA UN office will play an important part in the work as a base for the Evangelical UN work."

Hansjörg Leutwyler, General Secretary of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance, added, "The new office will give the persecuted church not only a voice at the United Nations but will also give the Evangelical Alliance a more visible face and profile in our nation."

NECF Malaysia is a member of WEA, which is made up of 127 national evangelical alliances located in seven regions, and 104 associate member organisations. WEA's vision is to extend the Kingdom of God by making disciples of all nations and by Christ-centered transformation within society.

WEA exists to foster Christian unity, provide an identity, voice and platform for the 420 million evangelical Christians worldwide, and unify Christians worldwide through local churches in 122 countries, bringing peace, religious liberty, justice and reconciliation to their communities. ▲

NECF's policy on membership application for breakaway churches

CHURCHES that break away from their existing churches or denominations must be in existence for at least three years before NECF Malaysia will process their application for membership.

However if the church has a letter of endorsement from its "mother" church to support its application, then NECF's policy of one-year existence for new churches applies.

The three-year period for break-away churches serves as a cooling period for the healing of relationships, if necessary. During this time, leaders from both churches can work out their issues and reconcile (if necessary).

NECF also advises churches to put into their constitution a neutral party who will be called upon to mediate in times of conflict. This is a proactive step so that should conflicts arise, the appointed mediators can immediately assume their role to resolve the problem.

NECF has in place a group of trained mediators who can help churches in need of mediation services. ▲

A superficial reading of the Old Testament would lead one to think that there was no religious freedom in ancient Israel (see for example, <http://www.answer-christianity.com/death.htm>). For if you happened to be born into an Israelite family you are bound by the Ten Commandments and the other laws that came with the Mosaic Covenant. Under the Mosaic Law, the worship of idols and the breaking of the Sabbath were punishable by death. If you were born an Israelite you had no choice whatsoever but to worship the God of the Old Testament and in the manner prescribed. And so it seems.

Is the God of the Old Testament the same God of the New Testament? The seeming lack of religious freedom in

failed to do so despite repeated warnings, they were exiled to Assyria and Babylonia.

This aspect of the Israelite religion has a very important implication on the question of religious freedom in the Old Testament. Since the occupation of the land was conditioned upon observing the Mosaic Covenant, any Israelite living in the land is deemed to have chosen to be, or remain, in the religion and be bound by the Mosaic Covenant. Anyone who chose to opt out of the religion must also opt out of the land.

The death penalty on worshipping idols or breaking the Sabbath was intended for violations committed within the promised land. And there was no law that forbade an Israelite from leaving the religion by leaving the land.

The book of Ruth indicates that it was possible for an Israelite

Religious Freedom in the Old Testament

By Leong Tien Fock, Ph.D

ancient Israel suggests otherwise. To address this apparent discrepancy we need to explore an aspect of the Old Testament religion usually ignored in Old Testament studies.

I am referring to the question of whether an Israelite individual or family could opt out of the Israelite religion at will. Since anyone in ancient Israel who worshipped foreign gods could be put to death, could he (opt out)? Could they?



family to migrate out of the promised land. In this particular case, they left the land and sojourned in Moab because of a famine and not because of a rejection of the Israelite religion.

But there is no reason to believe that an Israelite family who wanted to worship the gods of Moab instead of the God of their forefathers could not have migrated to Moab for this very purpose. And there is no reason to suppose that the religious leaders of Israel

would stop them from leaving.

So, as long as those who have renounced the Israelite faith do not worship their foreign gods within the promised land they are not punishable by the Mosaic Law.

If they do not leave the land they are considered to have opted to remain in the religion and are therefore punishable by the relevant religious laws. So the blanket prohibition to worship idols or break the Sabbath (within the promised land) does not imply a lack of religious freedom in ancient Israel.

Hence a careful reading of the Old Testament shows that no Israelite would be punished for leaving the religion as he would have to also leave the land, and as a result the Mosaic Law would no longer be applicable.

We are not aware of another religion practised today that is bound up with a piece of land. This means it is easy to misunderstand the Old Testament on the subject of religious freedom. ▲

A PIECE OF LAND

The Mosaic Covenant was made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai soon after Moses led them out of Egypt (Exodus 19). God had spoken to them that if they would keep this covenant, He would be their God and they would be His people. They were given a choice as to whether they would be bound by this covenant. The people unanimously chose to do so. So there was religious freedom.

The question then arises: What about the future generations who did not participate in that choice? Since religion is a matter of personal conscience, why should they be bound by the choice of their forefathers? They did not choose to be born an Israelite to begin with!

It must be recognised that the Israelite religion was bound up with a piece of land. God made it very clear that they must observe the Mosaic Covenant in order to enter as well as remain in the promised land. In fact, later in their history when they

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

IS THERE A NEED TO TALK ABOUT CHURCH GOVERNANCE? After all, churches have been in existence for almost 2,000 years and an ideal church methodology of governance should have already been in place.

In view of the increasing number of church splits, church scandals arising from poor accountability, and churches being stifled by legalism, traditions and bureaucratic governance, it is perhaps appropriate and timely to re-look some of the underlying biblical principles and their application in reforming and transforming the local church.

By Datuk Paul Low

The local church must be effective in carrying out its mission not just as a local church, but as an integral part of God's kingdom.

Meanwhile, we are mindful that the church operates in an earthly environment that is dynamic and constantly changing, being impacted by social, political and economic variables that influence the hearts, mind and physical well being of its members.

Jesus says, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt 16:18). A strong church is one that is built by Christ and not by man. It is built upon the Rock with a strong foundation.

While churches are diverse with individual uniqueness, there are nevertheless fundamental non-negotiable truths on what the church ought to be and its goal. One basic non-negotiable truth is God's creation order in which the delineation of authority is rooted.

Nonetheless, Jesus speaks very little about how a church can be organised, and it would be foolhardy to assume one size fits all. The first century churches were not dependent on one model but on the authority and anointing of the leaders who held the positions.

The leaders exercised their God-given authority in both a hierarchical and democratic manner. Any form of

governance will be good if the right people hold the leadership positions. Therefore, it would be erroneous to stipulate that there is one best form of church government or governance.

Administration vs Ministry

Often, we see the conflict of interests between the administrative and ministerial functions in churches. A rigid or overpowering administrative structure could become a major hindrance to a ministry, reducing its effectiveness and retarding its ability to carry out the mission of the church.

On the other hand, an ineffective administrative structure would allow very little accountability and poor stewardship in ministries. Therefore, one can say that a good church governance structure requires flexibility and ability to adapt to changes in circumstances, with sound administrative and supervisory structure to ensure adequate accountability.

One may observe that when leadership is made up of those appointed or elected based on gifts, status or financial contribution, church governance becomes tightly regulated with bureaucracies, spending a great deal of time in preparing budgets or fundraising projects. Ministries become

performance- or project-oriented, driven by competitiveness. The first group of casualties includes the burnt-out pastors and team leaders and of course, the stifled Holy Spirit.

A founding pastor who has had a bad experience with the overpowering administrative structure will find it hard

to trust a church governance structure with shared leadership and accountability to a board of elders. Insecure, fearful of failure or driven by performance, he may then opt for a structure with low level of delegation and a high propensity of

competitiveness. This would lead towards a one-man-up-ship and members' blind submission. Christ as the church's spiritual Head would eventually be replaced by a personality cult.

The human body

It is important to recognise that the basic foundation of the church is based on relationship -first with God, then with one another. As vividly described by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 using the analogy of human body, the church is closely akin to an *organism* with every member of the body, having individual functions, assuming his part to discharge his gifts accordingly.

Each member works in unison with the other, giving support, cooperating and collaborating to ensure that all functions are carried out diligently and effectively.

Therefore, good church governance will promote unity rather than division

• CONTINUED ON PG 10



Good church governance will promote unity rather than division.

Current Concerns for your prayers

Don't pass it

THE Lina Joy case has stirred such great interest that in August, SMS messages were intensely circulating saying that the Federal Court had reached a decision on the case. Thinking the messages to be true, several groups gathered at the Palace of Justice that housed the Federal Court to await the decision.

In response, Chief Justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim told reporters on Aug 23, "We will not rush to deliver the decision".

Similarly NECF Malaysia wrote to its member churches to advise them to stop spreading rumours or passing on unverified messages about the issue. NECF urged Christians to remain prayerful at all times and entrust the matter to God's sovereignty.

When the judgement is released, Christians are reminded to humbly receive the judgement, whatever it may be, and allow the national leadership of the Church to respond appropriately.

In the case, Joy, a Malay who converted to Christianity, wants a declaration that Article 11 of the Constitution gives her the right to convert to another religion.

Joy appealed to the Federal Court against the Court of Appeal's majority decision on Sept 19 last year, which ruled that the National Registration Department director-general was right in not allowing her application to delete the word "Islam" from her identity card.

The appeal will also rule whether the department had correctly construed its powers under the National Registration Regulations 1990 to require Joy to produce a certificate from the Syariah Court to prove her conversion.

Pray for the three judges – Ahmad Fairuz, Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak Datuk Richard Malanjum and Federal Court Judge Datuk Alauddin Sheriff – that their hearts will be guarded by their oath to judge with integrity,

courage and honour. Pray for protection for Joy's emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing.

On a related matter, lawyer Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, who has been holding a watching brief for the Bar Council in Joy's trial, has been issued death threats for supporting Joy's appeal.

Malik is described as 'the traitor-lawyer' supporting the Joy case. He is also the president of the National Human Rights Society (Hakam), the secretary of the pro-tem committee of the Malaysian Civil Liberties Society (MCLS).

Plead for God to silence the voice of religious and racial extremism intended to provoke riots. Pray for protection and continued courage for those in the forefront of fighting for justice. ➤

Islam Hadhari in our school

THE Education Ministry is working towards assimilating Islam Hadhari (civilisational Islam) into the national school curriculum and will hold a national seminar in November to coordinate the programme (*Berita NECF*, Sept 13).

Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said the plan was in line with the prime minister's desire and religious and academic experts would attend the seminar.

The ministry is conducting an ongoing programme on understanding Islam Hadhari among the academic staff.

Islam Hadhari is what the PM calls "progressive Islam", a "new approach to Islam that seeks to balance man's responsibility in the here and the hereafter (this life and the next). It is a response to a "problem" – the so-called backwardness of the Malays (read March/April *Berita NECF* editorial).

So pray that this programme will help to battle Islamic extremism in our country and the programme will be taught by responsible, fair-minded teachers. Pray that God will use the

programme to enlighten the minds of our children and teach them to be more appreciative of each other's beliefs. ➤

The crime scourge

WHILE the authorities consider effective measures to keep the roads safe, the snatch theft scourge continues to plague the public in the face of the manpower shortage faced by the police. Women have been the prime targets as they are easy prey and even the handicapped ones have not been spared.

Police are taking several measures to arrest the increasing crime rate. Among them is a proposal to introduce the DNA Identification Bill which will empower the police to keep the DNA sample of a criminal.

Other measures include increasing the number of patrols in high crime rate areas and arranging for special forces to raid place identified as snatch theft areas.

The government is also considering training People's Volunteer Corp (Rela) members and making Rukun Tetangga compulsory to help make our roads and neighbourhoods safer.

Meanwhile, it was reported that crime is expected to be aggravated with growing urbanisation. By 2010, six out of 10 Malaysians will be living in cities and it is anticipated that this surge in urban population will generate acute social problems, especially crime.

The authorities must therefore ensure that housing, jobs, public safety and utilities for the urban population are adequate to meet future challenges.

Pray for the various government departments and ministries – for example, the Home Affairs and Defence Ministries, and Police and Immigration departments – to work in unity, that they will be focussed on the issues and solutions. Pray for churches to be effective in their roles to be a blessing to their communities, helping to promote and strengthen neighbourly ties with their community activities.

Current Concerns for your prayers

Pray also for the new Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Musa Hassan that God will guide him and give him divine wisdom, courage and will to make our place safer. Pray God will help him to stand against corruption and immorality, and as the chief police of the country, he will be a man of justice and integrity. ▲

Poor management

A SPECIAL fund channelled to several states to help the poor has been used for unrelated matters, according to the recently-released Auditor-General's Report 2005.

Apart from Terengganu, which received the lion share of the fund, the other poorer states that received some money are Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, Pahang and Negri Sembilan.

Kedah state government used its RM40 million fund to put up billboards to announce the premier and deputy premier's visits, buy pin labels for dignitaries as well as hats and clothes for the state assembly's march pass team in conjunction with the Merdeka celebrations, and pay for the carpets and 'timber blinds' in the menteri besar's office and filming equipment for ntv7 crews.

Meanwhile, Negeri Sembilan took out RM5.44 million from the fund to acquire furniture for the Seremban and Port Dickson district councils administration office, and RM4.50 million to convert the state's official guest house into the menteri besar's residence.

Pahang spent RM0.92 million from the fund to finance the additional cost incurred in the construction of the Islamic Council and Malay Cultural complex. The report stated that the additional cost should have been borne by the Pahang Islamic Council.

Pray for honesty, integrity and wisdom for the state governments concerned that they use the funds to help improve the lives of the poor in their states. Thank God for the honest,

impartial and detailed Auditor-General's report that has exposed the misuse and abuse of the fund meant to help the poor.

Pray that the report will compel the authorities to act swiftly to correct their missteps. ▲

Four States

MINISTER in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz wants the constitutional law, which forbids others to spread religions other than Islam to the Muslims, to be streamlined nationwide.

He told reporters at the Parliament lobby on Aug 24 that Sarawak, Sabah, Federal Territory and Penang had yet to adopt the law.

Four days later, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi directed the four states to amend their respective constitutions to pave the way for the implementation of the Federal Constitution pertaining to religion.

Pray for God's wisdom and strength for the Church and for Christians to remember God's charge to be salt and light. Pray Christians will shine in their workplace and others will be drawn to God by their lives. ▲

Drug addicts – Police need help

MALAYSIAN police are struggling to resolve the problem of the nation's estimated 300,000 drug users and want other agencies to help rehabilitate them so that it can focus on nabbing the traffickers and pushers (*NST, Aug 9*).

The number of addicts in state-run drug rehabilitation programmes has fallen to 5,000 compared to 10,000 three years ago, as more offenders are merely fined and return to the streets under police supervision.

"Rehabilitating addicts will serve the addicts and society better, rather than putting them in prison," said IGP Tan Sri Musa Hassan.

More than half the drug users in

Malaysia return to their habit after treatment, resulting in an estimated 40,000 convicted drug users on the streets among a population of 26.7 million population.

Pray for success for the drug rehab centres. Pray for Christian-run centres that God will provide all their financial needs, so that they can focus on making a lasting, life-changing impact on the lives of their inmates. ▲

Suicide

SUICIDE cases are highest among the Indian community and the main reasons are poverty, alcoholism, physical abuse and high school dropout rates, (*The Star, July 24*).

It quoted Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia professor Dr T. Maniam as saying that suicides were three times higher in the Indian community with 30-35 per 100,000 cases compared with the national average of 10-12 per 100,000.

The psychiatry professor said suicide cases among the Chinese were 15 per 100,000 and Malays six per 100,000. He noted the Indian community's lax attitude towards suicide also contributed to the high number.

Dr Maniam recommended that lay counselors be mobilised to provide support to those in distress and to make people aware that there was such a support. The long-term goal is poverty eradication, reduction of access to pesticides and improve marital relationships and parenting skills.

Pray for the various government agencies such as the National Population and Family Development Board, and other NGOs to work together to identify ways to help improve the Indian community through education and vocational and technical training so that they can lead productive lives.

Pray for the Tamil Church that God will grant them ideas for effective social outreach programmes to touch their communities. ▲

or church split.

The administrative function of the church can be called a ministry of help. It assumes a supporting role to the church ministries to ensure proper stewardship and accountability. It is like the bones of a human body, giving framework to hold the body in its proper shape.

Taking away the bones, the body will become one big lump of flesh and

contentment, thankfulness and so on are essence that forms the fabric of godly governance.

Getting the Right Leaders

The rights to elect or appoint church leaders – pastors, elders and deacons – can be an issue in church governance. In the Malaysian context, a church is required by law to have its members at large to elect an office bearer if it is established

of leaders is best done by the overseers of the church consisting of the pastor, elders and deacons who seek God's wisdom. As the church is not the same as a secular organisation but a body of Christ established for divine purposes, its leadership must be established based on biblical principles and based on God's gracious calling.

Regardless of the structures, good governance comes from having an anointed and upright leader (pastor or elder in charge) who: is the "first among equals,"; undertakes the responsibility of appropriating God-given authority; has humility to seek godly counsel among his peers of leadership; and is willing to be held accountable.

Good governance begins from selecting the right person in accordance with biblical principles and hearing from God. 1 Timothy 3 lays down clearly what is expected of a leader. Good governance also requires the leader to carefully heed God's warning in shepherding "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:38).

In the end, good governance equals good leaders who, like the Good Shepherd, are willing to lay down their lives for their flocks. – *This article is contributed by the NECF Research Commission.*

When leadership is made up of those appointed or elected based on gifts, status or financial contribution, church governance becomes tightly regulated with bureaucracies, spending a great deal of time in preparing budgets or fundraising projects.

useless.

Every part of the body is an integrative part of a whole system. Likewise, all ministries including the administration are not independent of each other but mutually interdependent and function as one in unity. Cooperation and collaboration become inherently natural.

When legalism and traditions become the over-arching foundation, the church becomes an institution and is lifeless. Godly attributes are the internal fuel of a church. Faith in God, obedience to the Word, humility, love, servanthood, unity, joy, compassion, forgiveness,

under the Societies or Companies Act. While this seems most democratic, it causes some key problems.

First, an elected leader, like it or not, would have to govern the church to meet the demands of its members - 'the voters'. This could involve some kind of self-interests, and the leader could succumb to the fear of man.

Secondly, it could encourage politicking in the church and factionalism. It is not uncommon to witness instances of rowdy annual general meetings where members are unhappy with the leadership or where there are conflicts.

In general, election and appointment

PAST AND PRESENT



PAST chairmen of NECF Malaysia Elder David Boler (seated with his wife) and Rev. Datuk Prince Guneratnam with present chairman Rev. Eu Hong Seng at a dinner in September to honour and thank Rev. Guneratnam.

Elder Boler helmed the council from 1982 to 1994, and was succeeded by Rev. Guneratnam. Rev. Eu, who took over from Rev. Guneratnam at the May biennial general meeting, thanked the latter for his 12 years of leadership under which NECF has grown into a significant, visible and credible organisation in the country.

Rev. Eu said the NECF Council has agreed to appoint Rev. Guneratnam as the council's co-advisor with Elder Boler in recognition of his leadership.

The dinner was attended by NECF council, staff and commission chairmen, and several Klang Valley pastors.

Nations at our doorstep

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF THE MANY foreign workers in our country? Maids? Labourers? Factory workers? Do you also think about crimes, gang fights and infectious diseases?

The foreign workers in our midst have certainly impacted our society – both positively and negatively. But let us pause and think about WHO they are, rather than WHAT they do for us, whether good or bad. Think about them as human beings – just like us, precious individuals whom God loves and desires to fellowship with. Think about the opportunities God has given the Malaysian Church to touch their lives, writes lawyer cum Interserve Vice-Chairman VICKY NG.

Malaysia is now host to an estimated two million migrants. As at July 31, there are *1,823,431 foreigners from at least 22 countries working as domestic maids, and in the construction, manufacturing, services and plantation sectors.

The five countries with the most workers here are Indonesia (1,172,990), Nepal (199,962), India (130,768), Vietnam (96,892) and Bangladesh (64,156). The others are Pakistanis, Myanmarese, Cambodians and a small pocket from the Middle East. This does not include the daily, steady influx of illegals onto our shores.

If you take a stroll along some of the streets of Kuala Lumpur such as Jalan Tun Tan Siew Sin, or visit shopping malls such as *Kota Raya* and *KLCC* on a weekend afternoon, you may think you are in a foreign country as you confront a sea of foreign faces. In fact many of the shops along Jalan Tun Tan Siew Sin have notices in Nepalese and special eateries have sprung up to cater to differing ethnic palates.

In the housing estates of Kuala Lumpur's Ampang, some of the high-rise apartments are occupied by Middle Easterners from Lebanon and Iraq.

How shall the local churches respond to these people groups that have come into our nation? Dare we ignore the two million migrants and go about our business as usual? Do we see these people as the Lord Jesus sees them – sheep without a shepherd?

The mandate that the Lord Jesus gave to His followers *to go and make disciples of all nations* is even more urgent and relevant now. *The nations are at our doorstep*. The Church in Malaysia needs to rise up to the challenge and reach out to the migrant workers in our midst with the love and gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It has become somewhat “trendy” for many churches to organise short-term mission trips of between seven and 14 days to countries such as India, China, Vietnam, Cambodia. Certainly, there is a place and purpose for short-term missions overseas.

However, it would be a grave and tragic omission on our part if we ignore these same people groups at our doorstep – and they are here to stay for the long term. It is time to re-think cross-cultural missions in Malaysia and include the migrants.

Initial Contacts in Myanmar

In 2000, I joined Asian Outreach on a mission trip to Myanmar to conduct a one-week leadership and training seminar at the Shan Baptist Church, Yangon.

Back home over the next two years, I got involved in reaching out to migrant workers here.

I met Pastor Lily and her Myanmarese co-worker, Pau Kek, from New Life Restoration Church, PJ (NLRC) and soon accompanied the NLRC team to Dengkil to help in their Myanmar outreach work. We also had the opportunity to go to a pig farm in



Outings – like this one organised for the Myanmarese brethren and their non-believing friends to the Doulos ship – are little ways to show the Church cares.

Tanjung Sepat to conduct worship services in the farm. It was a joy to network with Christians from other churches who shared a common vision to reach out to the migrant workers.

Once, I found myself representing a Myanmar brother in Kajang Magistrate's court on a plea of mitigation so that he would not be whipped for overstaying. Later I visited him at the Kajang prison and encouraged him and gave him a Bible. To the best of my knowledge, he was deported and is now back in Yangon training for the ministry.

Beginnings of Outreach

As the burden for outreach among the migrant workers grew in my heart, my church, Praise Baptist Church, Sri Damansara (PBC), took the first step of hosting a dinner for a small group of Nepalese workers, one of whom was the *jaga* in my office building.

At an Easter evangelistic outreach in 2005, I invited a Lebanese bakery owner, Fadi, to a dinner. Fadi gave his life to the Lord Jesus that evening.

Subsequently a group from PBC visited a *pasar malam* in Kepong Industrial Park and met up with some Vietnamese workers from a nearby factory. Over a period of three months, we visited them in their hostel, took them for outings and ran English classes for them. However after three months, we sensed they had no desire to continue befriending us, so we stopped.

• CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Last year, a churchmate, Poh Gaik went to a *mamak* restaurant in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, KL, to buy dinner. An Indonesian waitress, Sari, working there approached her and asked whether she was a Christian. (probably the necklace around Poh Gaik's neck was the telltale sign). Sari expressed desire to go to church and soon two Indonesian waitresses came to worship with us.

Another churchmate, Fong Peng, met a Myanmar, Joseph, in Sri Damansara and invited him to come to our church. Joseph, started coming to church and soon he brought more Myanmar brothers. Over six months, we befriended them and their non-believing friends through outings, excursions and a special Christmas programme.

After prayer and discussion with the Myanmar brothers, we decided to start

wanted us to wait upon Him. He alone will give us the green light. Out of His sovereign grace He brought the Myanmar to us. His timing is always perfect.

• God taught us patience and perseverance. We were discouraged by the lack of positive response from the Vietnamese. God Himself will establish His work among the specific migrant group that He wanted us to work with.

• God used that period to prepare us as a church and to raise up a core group of our church members who would be committed to minister to the migrant workers.

• God taught us that while our church was quite active in short-term missions



Myanmar brethren presenting an item at the launching of the PBC Myanmar fellowship in August.

church to reach out to the migrant workers if only His people are willing and obedient.

• There is tremendous opportunity for the Malaysian Church across all denominations to cooperate, partner and network with one another and share resources to do the work of ministry among the migrants. This is the essence of love and unity in the body of Christ that our Lord Jesus himself would encourage and commend. The task is too big for any one church to handle.

The migrant workers are scattered and found everywhere.

• The migrant workers are often lonely and displaced people. They have left their families, friends and familiarity of their home country to come to Malaysia to earn a living.

Many work under harsh and oppressive conditions and are victims of exploitation by unscrupulous employment agencies or employers.

They feel vulnerable, weak and helpless. Under such conditions, they respond readily to sincere acts of love and friendship. Acts of love can take the form of invitation for *makan*, organisation of outings and excursions for them; provision of recreational activities and teaching them English or Bahasa.

These form the basis of initial friendship with them and once trust has been established and respect earned, opportunities abound to share with them the gospel and the love of Jesus Christ.

* Figures were provided by Parliamentary secretary to the Home Ministry Datuk Paduka Abdul Rahman Ibrahim at the Dewan Rakyat on Sept 11. 

“For many of them, their dislocation from their home country means that for the first time in their lives, they will have a chance to hear the gospel, which otherwise they would not have had the opportunity.”

the PBC Myanmar Christian Fellowship (PBCMCF) and so on August 6, we launched the fellowship with a vision is to build and edify Myanmar Christians and to reach out to other Myanmar workers in Sri Damansara.

It is marvellous to know that there are many urban churches in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya working among the foreign students enrolled in our universities and colleges. Truly these churches have caught the vision to reach out to these students with the love of Jesus Christ.

Lessons Learnt

• The Master saw our love for the migrants. In our zeal we were going here and there looking for them but He

at home and abroad, a more rewarding, enduring and focused work would be among the migrant workers who would be in Malaysia at least for the next two to three years of their contract.

There would be ample opportunities to train, equip and disciple them and to share the gospel with them. Upon their return to their home country, they could be church planters and evangelists in their remote provinces.

For many of them, their dislocation from their home country means that for the first time in their lives, they will have a chance to hear the gospel which otherwise they would not have had the opportunity.

• Our church is a small one but God is no respecter of size. He can use a small

COMING UP

BM LEADERS CONFERENCE

THE NECF Malaysia BM Commission is organising the above conferences with the theme "Leader: Skill, Character, Vision and Management".

The conferences will focus on leadership skills, character, vision and management of church ministry in the present times.

The conferences are jointly organised with the Ranau Council of Churches and Pusat SIB Sarawak.

Place: Sarikei, Sarawak

Date: Oct 16-18

Speakers: Rev. Dr Bambang Widjaya and Dr Herbert Tan
Contact: Pr Peter Mutang (013-8140028); Pr Robin Ato (013-8140028)

Place: Ranau, Sabah

Date: Oct 23-25

Speakers: Rev. Dr Bambang Widjaya and Rev. Wong Kim Kong
Contact: Elder George Mikil – (013-8608285)

Regional Prayer Consultation (South)

THE NECF Prayer Commission will hold its southern peninsula regional consultation from Oct 31 to Nov 2 at Good Shepherd Seminary, Melaka. This is the second regional consultation this year. The first one was held for the northern peninsula in May.

The consultation aims to increase the prayer momentum through a strong network of prayer leaders and pastors within their region.

Contact Ann Low (NECF Executive Secretary – Prayer) at 016-3349239, or Joshua K (southern region prayer coordinator) at 016-3106633.

New Members

NECF MALAYSIA welcome the following as **Ordinary Members**:

- **Harvest Church, Muar**, pastored by *Rev. Sheng Peng Hui*
- **EI-Shaddai Praise Prayer Centre, JB**, pastored by *Karuppiah a/l Muthiah*
- **Hope of God, Sarikei, Sarawak**, pastored by *Elijah Fen*
- **Hope of God Bintulu**, pastored by *Chieng Kung Ching*
- **The Tabernacle @ Seremban**, pastored by *James Niles*
- **Miracle Signs & Wonders Fellowship, Kota Damansara, P. Jaya**, pastored by *Paul Lai Nae Jian*
- **Glorious Sanctuary, AOG, Selangor**, pastored by *Wong Tek Seng*
- **Canaan Church, Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Rev. Daniel Loh*
- **Kledang Community Chapel, Ipoh**, pastored by *Elder Leong Sea Fook*
- **Jesus is Lord Church, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Garry B. Ramirez*
- **Praise Emmanuel Assembly, Klang**, pastored by *Rev. Roberts Pandian*
- **Viva Network Asia Centre Bhd, Kuala Lumpur**, represented by *Ian de Villiers*
- **Ekklesia Evangelical Fellowship, Klang**, pastored by *James a/l Savistian*
- **Ekklesia Evangelical Fellowship, Seri Kembangan, KL**, pastored by *Murugesh a/l Sandanam Addickan*

- **Ekklesia Evangelical Fellowship, Seremban**, pastored by *Christy Rajah a/l Kaliyappan*
- **Living Water AOG, Tampin**, pastored by *Rev. Wan Moi Kim*
- **Bridge International Church, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Todd Nelson*
- **Elim Revival Church, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Philip Gunathilaka*
- **City Praise Assembly, Puchong, Selangor**, pastored by *Paul Muniandy*
- **Emmanuel Baptist Church, Petaling Jaya**, pastored by *Joshua Tan Tiong Yee*
- **Pertubuhan Penyelidikan Kristian Kingdom Malaysia, Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya**, pastored by *Tommy Ting Lai Inn*
- **Calvary Harvest Church, Cheras, Selangor**, pastored by *Chong Chee Sian*
- **Church of Living Streams, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur**, pastored by *Tan Lai Boon*
- **Church of Living Water, Sibul**, pastored by *Rev. Loh Lin Kion*
- **Persatuan Penganut Agama Kristian Rhema Manjung, Ayer Tawar, Perak**, pastored by *Mah Ai Bing*

NECF also welcome 12 people as **Associate Members**: Pr Sesuraja Anthony; Ms Kok Li Shan; Robin Lim Fang Say; James Kui Jee Yeng; Pr Papaie a/p Kandasamy; Pr Wong Wei Yen; Rev. Steven Kau Yuen Fook; Pr Lydia Ng Yoke Mooi; Pr Isaac Chee Wooi Chi; Joseph Tan Lip Tee; S.M. Subramaniam a/l Muthan; and Pr Anthony s/o Saminathan.

THIS issue, we look at Melaka, historically known as ‘The Emporium of the East’, where the first Malay sultanate started and where the architecture of its town is shaped by centuries of Portugese, Dutch and British colonisation. Founded in the 14th century by Parameswara, a Palembang prince, Melaka continues to draw tourists with its well-guarded historical sites and easy pace of life.

It is currently the political stronghold of Barisan Nasional. Kota Melaka, a seat held by DAP since 1969, was taken over by BN in the 2004 elections..



temple were demolished by local authorities because they were illegally built on private land meant for agricultural purposes.

Despite the Islamic zeal, it is generally acknowledged that racial assimilation with the other races and minor groups has enriched the Malay society and laid a strong foundation for the state.

Prof. Datuk Shamsul Amri Baharuddin of University Kebangsaan Malaysia, the consultant to the mandatory course *Ethnic Relations* for first-year students at public institution of higher learning, believes that Melaka “is the apex of ethnic relations and this is how we need to see it in the light of our interest in ethnic relations today” (*NST*, Feb 5).

Corruption

In 2004, the Auditor-General queried the state government on its lack of proper allocation for development on *tanah wakaf* (endowment land). Only 10% of the allotted land was developed to benefit the community. The AG also questioned the government’s expenditure on state projects.

The same year, Melaka stole the headlines by liberally awarding 84 datukships to mark the 66th birthday of its governor. For months, the incident was highly criticised as it reflected an expansion of money politics, and thus affected the integrity of the title.

In January, DAP lodged a report with

• SEE NEXT PAGE

STATISTICS (MALAYSIA STATISTICS DEPARTMENT, 2005)

Population: 713,000 (est.)

Ethnic groups: Malay 60.86%, Other Bumiputera (Temuan) 1.23%, Chinese 26.82%, Indian 6.09%, Others 0.68% (Kristang, Eurasian), Non-citizen 4.32%

Religious Breakdown (2000):

Islam 64.2%, Buddhism 24.1%, Hinduism 5.6%, Christianity 3.9%, Taoism/Confucianism 1.5%, Other 0.2%, No Religion 0.4%, Unknown 0.1%

Incidence of poverty (2004): 1.8%, Hardcore 0.2%

Islamisation and Human Rights Development

Melaka was central in the spread of Islam in the peninsular and its main contribution to the evolution of Malay culture is the incorporation of Islamic ideas.

Parameswara, is said to have converted to Islam in 1411 after marrying a princess from Pasai. Other documents credit Sri Maharaja Muhammad Shah (1424-45) as the first ruler to convert to Islam. His son, Mudzaffar Shah (1446-59), proclaimed Islam the state religion.

Regardless, the conversion of the Melaka Sultanate to Islam is seen as a watershed in Melaka’s history in the political concept of kingship, and in terms of economic advantages and territorial expansion. Its vassal states were persuaded or compelled to adopt Islam, and its commercial success reinforced self-islamization.

Once established as the religion of the Malays, Islam profoundly affected Malay society and the Malay way of life.

In 1988, the state government formalised the prohibition of propagation by passing the *Control and*

Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religious Enactment. The Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment 1991 prescribes punishment (detention at Islamic rehabilitation centres) to Muslims who attempt murtad (apostasy).

In Aug 2004, the local council directed restaurant operators to remove beer advertisements and logos from their premises. The reasons given were communal sensitivities and to prevent the historic city from the image of a ‘beer-drinking city.’

In Feb 2005, the Chief Minister launched a moral squad called *Pasukan Gerak Khas 4B*, set up by a youth group to spy on people and deter behaviour considered indecent under Islamic law. The Cabinet directed the state government to disband the squad after the public protested.

Following this, the media highlighted the case of a non-Muslim family of a deceased fireman who secretly converted to Islam. The family lost their inheritance right when the Chinese fireman died officially a Muslim.

His estate was placed under the administration of the Melaka Islamic Religious Council. In response to, the council donated half the estate ‘in kind’ to the family.

The case highlighted the dilemma of the country’s dual legal system and the hardship caused to families when one of their members convert to Islam.

Early this year, the Jasin reclining Buddha statue (supposedly the second largest in the country) and a Siamese

the Anti-Corruption Agency against the Melaka Chief Minister for an alleged misuse of charity health fund.

In April, a controversy was created by the Jasin member of Parliament who admittedly asked the Melaka Custom office to 'close one eye' over an import of illegal sawn timber.

Piracy

The Strait of Malacca is a critical and strategic waterway in the global trading system. More than 10 million barrels of crude oil pass through the strait every day, with more than 50,000 vessels transiting its waters every year.

In April, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore signed two agreements aimed at closer cooperation to strengthen the strait's security. Since then, piracy in the region has decreased markedly.

Financially stable, Melaka was considered one of the more developed states in 2005. Based on the Development Composite Index 2005, it ranked third after Kuala Lumpur and Pulau Pinang.

It remains one of the major choices of location for both domestic and foreign investment due to the availability of adequate and good infrastructure, proximity to air and sea hubs, financial centres and support services. Development projects in Melaka under the 9th Malaysian Plan include the upgrading of the airport to handle narrow-bodied jets to boost tourism.

The Church

Churches were established with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1511, the Dutch in 1641 and the British in 1786. The Portuguese brought in Roman Catholicism while the Dutch promoted Dutch Reformed Protestantism.

Today, Melaka houses some 20 Protestant churches. Functional unity among the churches is admirable. There has been concerted effort among the churches in organising evangelistic meetings and Christmas celebration.

Thanks to the influx of foreign workers, churches have been working together, sharing resources and manpower in

PRAY FOR:

- The people of this historical state may know the Eternal God who is the Ancient of Days.
- Local authorities to have wisdom and compassion for the less fortunate in their efforts to utilise Melaka's historical heritage to boost tourism. (Many tradesmen in the old quarters are slowly being displaced by businesses catering for tourists.)
- Integrity and efficiency in all government departments against all forms of corruption; crime (e.g. snatch theft and robbery, brawls in bars, murders, suicide, lawlessness, illegal racing, gambling, adultery, immoral behaviour).
- Youth of all ethnic groups: Wisdom, courage, and discernment; good role models and close family relationship; moral purity and honesty.
- Christian Youth: abiding personal relationship with Jesus Christ; living example of biblical principles of integrity and responsibility in relationship; pure-hearted; good witness among peers.
- Church: rekindled passion for the Lord; evangelistic efforts to bear fruit; relational unity across denomination; effective networking between the Christian students and local churches in all campus-outreaches; the ability to share relevant message amidst different beliefs and cultural backgrounds.

establishing vibrant migrant ministry. However, there is room for improvement in relational unity among the pastors for accountability and leadership bonding.

In terms of church growth, the Chinese-speaking churches have recorded strong growth while the English-speaking churches seem to be at status quo. Youth work, especially outreaches to the university and college students, has been fruitful.

Despite the active involvement in ministries and church activities, the Gospel has yet to become a lifestyle, commented one Christian leader in Melaka. The more affluent Christians tend to be complacent and materialistic. ▲

Correction

IN our last issue's *State Spot* focus on Johor (pg 14), we wrote: In 1991, the state passed the *Control and Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Bill*. The law provides for Christians to be fined up to RM4,000 or imprisoned up to four years for "exposing a Muslim to Christian literature, gospel music or even an evangelistic car bumper sticker".

A lawyer has informed us that this is inaccurate. The fact is Section 4 of the Bill says that a person commits an

offence if he persuades, influences, coerces or incites a Muslim to become a follower or member of a non-Muslim religion.

The penalty is a fine not exceeding RM10,000 or imprisonment not exceeding four years or both. The Bill also restricts the sending, delivering and distribution of non-Muslim religious publication to Muslims.

We also wrote: "Section 133 of the Johor Islamic Family Law Enactment 1990 provides apostasy as a punishable offence." The same lawyer has informed

that the Enactment had been repealed and replaced with the *Islamic Family Law (State of Johor) Enactment 2003 (Johor Enactment no. 17 of 2003)*.

Under the Enactment (which covers Muslims), "Any person who dislikes his or her spouse and by deception attempt to make himself or herself murtad in order to annul his or her marriage commits an offence and shall be punished with imprisonment not exceeding one year."

We apologise for the errors and thank the lawyer for her quick response.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



IRAN

IRAN'S President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is driven by his Shiite ideology. He believes the Mahdi (Islamic messiah) will soon return to Iran to lead the apocalyptic battle between good and evil. According to the myth, the Mahdi will return during a time of world chaos. Jesus will return from heaven to be the Mahdi's follower and pray behind him.

Jesus will fight against the Dajjal, the deceiver or false messiah. There will be an apocalyptic battle between good and evil and Jesus will declare Islam to be the true religion and convert all Christians to Islam. Then the Day of Resurrection will come. Hezbollah, an Iranian asset, holds the same ideology.

Ahmadinejad believes he is called to hasten the Mahdi's coming and prepare Iran to receive him. Accordingly, he has vowed to rid Iran of Christianity and all other offensive non-Islamic influences and practices. He is also agitating world chaos by inciting anti-Semitism, advocating genocide, bolstering his arsenal, courting dictators and stoking tension across the globe.

Persecution against the Iranian Church increased as soon as Ahmadinejad was elected. Iran's Ministry of Interior is run by former leaders in Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) secret police in the blood-soaked, post-revolution purge years.

While Iranian Christian leaders are facing increased risk of imprisonment and murder, Christians in general are being systematically driven into unemployment and hardship in what appears to be a government strategy to drive them from the country.

Pray for God's Holy Spirit to do an amazing, powerful work in Iran, revealing Christ as Messiah, Redeemer, Saviour and friend. Pray for our

persecuted brethren. May God give them strength and a profound experience of His presence and that God will provide them bold lawyers to defend their cases.

LEBANON

IT can be easy for Christians to tune out violence in the Middle East. Yet, the dimensions of any conflict in the region can affect Christians differently.

Lebanon has the largest percentage of Christians of any country in the Middle East, and fighting between Hezbollah and Israel in the country affect Christians differently than in Gaza, where Hamas and Israel are also fighting.

Pray for the displaced, injured, and mourning who are living in areas that have been devastated by heavy bombings; for the Church in Lebanon to be "salt and light" to the community, that God would be glorified in all that is said and done. ▲

CUBA

ABOUT half of Cuba's 11.2 million inhabitants are Christians, mainly Catholics. Over 35% are without religious affiliation and 17% are spiritists.

The country has been ruled by 79-year-old Communist dictator Fidel Castro since 1959. On Aug 1, he handed over provisional power to his younger brother, Raul, to undergo intestinal surgery. (He is now recuperating from the surgery.)

The change does not signal any change in the human rights situation, according to the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR).

In fact, Raul Castro is said to be even more of a Communist than Fidel.

ISHR, said the Communist regime is one of the worst violators of basic liberties in the world. Freedom of speech and religion are seriously impaired. Christian leaders are often arrested for

alleged political opposition.

Pray for the Church to stand firm; for courage for Christians to continue sharing the Good News; and for God to protect new believers.

Pray the Holy Spirit will bring a great revival to Cuba, leading Cuban authorities to repent of their brutal attacks against its people. ▲

AZERBAIJAN

THERE is growing sectarian tension between the Muslim 30% Sunnis and the 70% Shiites who are unlike Iranian Shiites. They are Turkic Azeri Shiites who mostly embrace secular government and look to Turkey, Israel and the West.

However the Sunnis, who are mostly ethnic minorities, are widely adopting the extreme Islamist Wahhabism and becoming politically active and threatening to the government and the Shiites whom they regard as heretics.

The threat of domestic terrorism and Iranian intervention seem real. Around 20 million ethnic Azeris live in Iran, more than double Azerbaijan's population. Iran's Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is an ethnic Azeri.

Azerbaijan's Christian minority is mostly Russian or Armenian so Azerbaijanis tend to view Christianity as the religion of the Russian and Armenian 'enemy'. Due to security issues arising from political Islam, Azerbaijan is now amending its already repressive Religion Law. With all 'sects' under scrutiny, Christians, especially Protestants, are likely to be targeted.

Pray for wisdom for the government and for the Church. Pray God will open the eyes of the leaders to the non-political, non-threatening, peaceful nature of Christian worship and fellowship. Pray for Azerbaijan's churches to be endowed with great spiritual wisdom and grace, and that they be united. ▲