

EDITORIAL

“A PASTOR RUNNING AN UNLAWFUL SOCIETY.”

That’s the charge heard in a recent court case. It turned out that the “unlawful society” was actually a church! A church that was registered as a society with the Registry of Societies (ROS) but that was subsequently deregistered. Since the church continued to operate in the same name and place, it was regarded as an unlawful society. Many Malaysian churches are registered with the ROS. The recent spate of deregistration has raised question marks over this whole issue of the relationship between churches and the ROS.

In this article, we attempt to clarify the major issues.

BEFORE YOU REGISTER

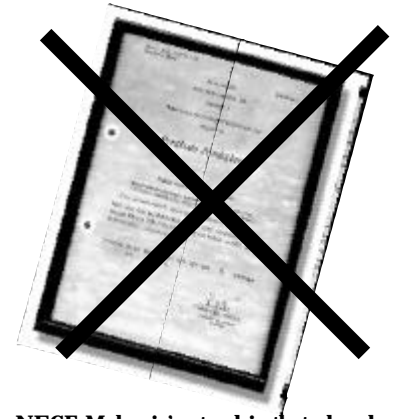
Does a church have to be registered as a society?

Article 11(1) of the Federal Constitution very clearly states, “every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate

it”. The right to practise religion must include the right to congregate together in the carrying out of religious practice. Article 11(3)(a) says that “every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes”. The word “institutions” must necessarily include churches, temples and the like. The very expression “religious group” used here already assumes that religious practice is often a group experience.

No conditions are found in Article 11 or in the rest of the Constitution that require a religious group to form a legal association before they can be regarded as lawful.

On top of this, Article 11(3)(a) of the Federal Constitution states, “every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs”. This implies that these groups cannot be compelled to form legal associations as in doing so they



NECF Malaysia’s stand is that churches do not need to be registered as societies.

subject themselves to many additional requirements. For example, by incorporating as a company or registering as a society, religious groups make themselves subject to all the requirements of the Companies Act 1965 and the Societies Act 1966, respectively.

They are also subject to the authority of the Registrar of Companies and the Registrar of Societies who may direct them to do certain acts or comply with certain conditions.

If it is felt that a conflict exists between the Societies Act 1966 and the Federal Constitution, this is resolved by Article 4(1) of the latter. It says, “This Constitution is the supreme law of the Federation and any law passed after Merdeka Day which is inconsistent with this Constitution shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void”.

NECF Malaysia’s stand is that churches do not need to be registered as societies.

Why do churches want to be registered as societies?

One reason is fear that if they don’t register, they may be breaking the law. As explained above, we hold that they

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- More Cheers For Full-Time Workers
- DVC – Threat or Opportunity?
- Moral, Immoral, Amoral – Who Decides?
- A Christian Perspective of the Ninth Malaysia Plan
- Adoption – Get It Right

NECF MALAYSIA COUNCIL

Chairman

Rev. Datuk Prince Guneratnam

Vice-Chairman

Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Honorary Secretary

Elder Kong Yeng Phooi

Honorary Treasurer

Mr Samuel Ang

Committee Members

Rev. Justin Wan

Rev. Dexter Low

Rev. Ng Kok Kee

Rev. Foo Moy Ping

Rev. Lim Soon Hock

Pr Tay Wah Seng

Dr Khoo Kay Hup

Mrs Grace Hee

Elder Chua Keng Seng

Advisor

Elder David Boler, K.M.N.

NECF MALAYSIA STAFF

Secretary-General

Rev. Wong Kim Kong, J.M.N.

Executive Secretaries

Ann Low (Prayer)

Kathryn Tan (Finance)

Patrick Cheng (Leadership

Development)

Lim Siew Foong (Research)

Ngeh Hoong Eng (Chinese)

Alfred Tais (Bahasa Malaysia)

Ong Juat Heng (Communications)

Tham Sing Kheong (Administration)

Rev. Lai Moo Him (Special Projects & Church Relations)

Sandy Tan (Secretary-General's Office)

Confidential Secretary

Ching Bee Gaik

Administrative Secretaries

Sangan Mutang

Administrative Assistants

Yvonne Chin

Jously Buaya

EDITORIAL

Editor

Rev. Wong Kim Kong, J.M.N.

Assistant Editor & Writer

Ong Juat Heng

ADDRESS

32, Jalan SS2/103,

47300 Petaling Jaya

Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 603-7727 8227

Fax: 603-7729 1139

E-mail: editor@necf.org.my

Printed by Akitiara Corporation

1 & 3, Jln TPP1/3, Tmn Industri Puchong
Batu 12, 47100 Puchong, Selangor

More Cheers for Full-Time Workers from the NECF Foundation

Free Specialists' Consultation for Full-time Workers

EIGHT more specialists – three in Melaka and five in Ipoh – have joined the NECF Foundation panel of professionals. The eight specialists are offering free consultation to full-time workers attached to churches or organisations, which are members of NECF Malaysia.

The three in Melaka are **Dr Au Mun Kit** (eye surgeon); **Dr Lim Boon Aik** (cardiologist/physician); and **Dr Lau Yoke Phan** (paediatrician), while the five in Ipoh are **Dr Teoh Soong Kee** (obstetrician and gynaecologist); **Dr Yoong Fook Ngian** (ear, nose and throat); **Dr Lam Fook Shin** (eye surgeon); and **Dr C.S. Koh** (cardiologist/physician).

There are now 11 specialists and one lawyer on the Foundation panel, but NECF is appealing to specialists from other states to join the panel to help full-time workers in their regions.



Those who require the specialists' services have to get a letter from their church/organisation stating the doctor to consult with and their ailment, and present the letter to NECF, which will then issue a referral letter to the doctor concerned.

For emergency cases, the full-time worker can contact NECF's Rev. Lai Moo Him who will then directly contact the doctor required. ■

Insurance Scheme

The NECF-Great Eastern (GE) insurance scheme is still available to Christians attending NECF member churches and NECF Associate Members.

The *Group Multiple Insurance Scheme Investment Linked with Critical Illness* offers insurance coverage on injuries or death due to accidents and medical ailments at only RM30 or RM50 per month.

Since the scheme started last September, the company has approved and paid out one claim for RM50,000 from a policyholder diagnosed with liver

cancer.

The company is now processing claims from two policyholders diagnosed with breast cancer. ■

Financial Aid

The Foundation has approved four applications for financial assistance totalling RM36,000.

The Foundation gave RM3,000 to a Johor pastor and RM5,000 to a Perlis pastor for medical assistance; a RM20,000 interest-free loan to a pastor for his son's tertiary education; and an RM8,000 interest-free loan to a youth worker for leadership training. ■

are not breaking the law.

Churches may also wish to acquire legal personality to enter into commercial transactions and to exercise legal rights as a group. Registered societies may also find it easier to apply for various permits from government authorities, such as converting land designated for residential purposes into property for religious purposes, bringing in foreign missionaries or speakers, and others.

What are the risks of registering as a society?

A registered society runs the risk of deregistration. A single complaint from a disgruntled member on the ground of some technicalities is sometimes enough to bring about deregistration.

The Registrar of Societies may cancel the registration of a society for various reasons. Deregistration can happen, for example, if a society has willfully contravened any provision of the Societies Act 1966 or of any regulation made under it (such as Societies Regulations 1984) or of any of its own rules. (Section 13(1)(c)(iv)) This is very broad. A society can also be deregistered for failing to comply with additional orders of the Registrar or if it is unable to settle an internal dispute.

When a society is deregistered, it becomes an unlawful society. Every branch of that society also becomes unlawful.

Note that a society that is denied registration (upon application) for whatever reason(s) also becomes an unlawful society.

The property of the deregistered society will be vested in the Official Assignee for the purpose of winding up the affairs of the society, which includes providing for all debts and liabilities of the society and the costs of winding up before paying out the surplus.

Registered churches should take extra care not to give grounds for complaints

“Registered churches should take extra care not to give grounds for complaints leading to deregistration.”

leading to deregistration. In any case, NECF is arguing that a church that is deregistered can still operate as a church (under Article

11 of the Federal Constitution), though not as a society. It will revert to its initial or primary constitutional status. Again, there’s a battle to fight here.

What are the alternatives to registration?

Article 11(3)(c) of the Federal Constitution says that “every religious group has the right to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law”.

By virtue of Section 43 of the National Land Code 1965, only four groups of persons or bodies are eligible to hold and deal in land (immovable property) in Malaysia, namely:

- (a) Natural persons other than minors;
- (b) Corporations having power under their constitutions to hold land;
- (c) Sovereigns, governments, organisations and other persons authorised to hold land under the Diplomatic & Consular Privileges Ordinance 1957; and
- (d) Bodies expressly empowered to hold land under any other written law.

Section 9(2)(d) of the Societies Act expressly allows societies to hold land in their name. Some churches also incorporate themselves as companies, usually private companies limited by guarantee. This comes under (b).

Setting up a trust is another possibility, which comes under (d). A trust is an arrangement under which property is given to one or more persons (called the trustee or trustees) to use or apply the property and the income from it, for other persons (the beneficiaries).

A trust can be easily created. Members of a church can appoint one or more trustees by resolution of a general

meeting. A memorandum of this resolution should be drawn up and signed either at the meeting by the person presiding, or afterwards and witnessed by two people who were present at the meeting.

A trust deed can also be prepared by an experienced and competent legal practitioner at the request of the church members or a committee formed for the purpose of appointing a trustee. The deed should precisely state the purpose of such a trust, the subject matter or trust property, and the beneficiaries.

However, the church must ensure that the trustees appointed are capable as well as trustworthy because of the extensive power they hold. While church members can sue for breach of trust, the process can be lengthy and involves many complications.

The trustees can also apply for a certificate of registration as a corporate body and this may be granted under the Trustees (Incorporation) Act 1952 (applicable in Peninsular Malaysia only).

The trust will then enjoy the benefit of perpetual succession, a common seal, power to sue or be sued in its corporate name and transact other business in its

“When a society is deregistered, it becomes an unlawful society. Every branch of that society also becomes unlawful.”

corporate name. Incorporation, however, is not strictly necessary.

The issue with movable property is more easily resolved. For example, NECF

Malaysia has an understanding with Public Bank whereby its banks allow churches to open accounts in their names with a support letter from NECF.

This aside, a non-registered church that is a member of a recognised organisation may get the necessary clearance with the support from the parent organisation. (If the church has set up a trust, all property can be held under the trust.)

This is also true when it comes to obtaining other approvals. NECF has helped many member churches with various kinds of applications.

Churches should intelligently and prayerfully consider the available options.

DVC – Threat or Opportunity?

By now, cinemas across the world will be blazing with *The Da Vinci Code* (DVC) movie starring megastar Tom Hanks. The movie has all the elements of a box office draw – mystery, conspiracy, action, drama and a blooming romance between the protagonists.

So, Malaysians will be flocking to the theatres to catch the controversial movie. Of course, Christians will be part – a large part, perhaps – of the crowd.

But weeks before D-day (May 19 – the movie's opening day), several Malaysian Christians called for the banning of the movie, but these are individuals speaking for themselves.

As far as is known, only one group here has publicly called for the movie to be banned (and it is not even a Christian group). The association, which concerns itself with languages, based its objection not on theology but linguistic.

On the other hand, our three national Christian bodies have not called for a ban but instead written pastoral letters and statements to advise their members. Churches have also held seminars, teaching sessions and group discussions on the allegations and controversies raised in the novel.

So, rather than ignore or boycott DVC (whether the novel or the movie), Christians now have a great opportunity to share their faith – and to sharpen their own beliefs in the process, according to Dr Jim Garlow, co-author of the bestselling *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* and *The Da Vinci Code Breaker*.

In his article in the April 25 *Christianity Today Online*, he said, "We could boycott it with loud protests, but I think that would only drive ticket sales even higher."

Instead of fuming over the book, he cheekily thanked Dan Brown (DVC author) for doing the church "a great favour" because his novel has provided "a great opportunity to sharpen our own faith by deepening our biblical and historical understanding".

"Brown is helping to motivate the church to learn its story. And if it learns its story, it will be able to defend itself against not only *The Da Vinci Code*, but other attacks on Christianity," he remarked.

Should Christians watch the movie? He advised, "Go

to the movie, but not with other believers. Go with unbelievers/seekers; the ensuing conversation could eventually lead them to faith in Christ. Christians, if they are strategic, will be in prime position to answer seekers' questions."

This leads us to an article in *The Star* on May 3 by Marina Mahathir who told the story of her friend's daughter who wanted to read the Bible after reading the novel. Her friend did not think it (reading the Bible) was a bad idea but she was concerned that an impressionable young mind would not be able to differentiate fact from fiction.

This outspoken lady then said something rather startling: "...perhaps what was needed is a Da Vinci Code-type book for Muslims to spark off the same level of interest in young people in their own religion."

Indeed, the novel has stirred much interest among Christians, young and old alike, and provoked us to search our faith on a deeper level.

Marina rightly pointed out that "While there are many Christians who are upset about the book and movie, they are countering it with seminars and other educational events to balance what is being said in the book, even if the book is only fiction."

NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong agreed that the DVC "is scandalous, bears much blasphemous depiction of Jesus and does not carry the truth of the Gospel. It is extremely offensive to us."

"However, Christians support the principle of freedom of expression and independent media but the right of this freedom must entail ethical and moral accountability and responsibility to the welfare of society. It should also include the credibility of truth," he added.

Rev. Wong believed the DVC has helped Christians to think more critically of their faith with the help of the many materials available from Christian organisations and the Internet. He concluded: "When one's belief is challenged, there arises the opportunity to search deeper. In the end, our faith is stronger because we have gone through much mind and soul searching." ■



Tom Hanks as Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon and Audrey Tautou as French cryptologist Sophie Neveu .

Moral, Immoral, Amoral Who Decides?

Morality is a contentious and complex subject. Long has there been a debate on whether public behaviour should be dictated by a few religious and moral vigilantes.

Some hold that Malaysia needs public morality in this era of permissiveness and promiscuity and that laws are needed to maintain social order. "The value of religious belief will not and should not be accepted as part of public morality unless they are shared by the pluralistic community at large, by consensus," said lawyer cum columnist Salbiah Ahmad in her article in *The Sun* (9 Aug 2005).

The question is: How can such consensus be achieved in a pluralistic society? Where does one draw the line between public and private? Most importantly, who determines the range of acceptable behaviour for all Malaysians of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds?

While Christians in general perceive prayer as a private affair and personal conviction, it is not so for the 68-year-old Kelantanese who was fined under the Kelantan Islamic Council and Malay Customs Enactment 1986 (Amt.1994) for not attending Friday prayers (*NST*, 30 March). Although holding hands in public may not be allowed in Islam, it is fairly common among Malaysians of other faiths.

In response to the arrest of 100 young Muslims at *Zouk* nightclub in Kuala Lumpur by the Federal Territory (FT) Religious Department in January 2005, the Cabinet affirmed its position that "morality issue is best left to the family" and crime prevention to the police. The Cabinet felt that the country had no need of moral policing to keep tabs on people's behaviour.

However, Datuk Dr Abdullah Mohamed Zin, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Islamic affairs, was reported to have defended the Religious Department's action. According to FT Syariah Criminal Offences Act, anyone "who, contrary to Islamic law, acts or behaves in an indecent manner in any public place shall be guilty of an offence."

Six years ago, club performer Azlina Abbas was detained by the Selangor Islamic Department (Jais)

for insulting Islam by being in premises where alcohol is served. The charge was later dropped. In 1997, three young Malay girls were arrested, charged and fined by the same department for indecent dressing and taking part in a beauty contest.

Islamic laws govern every aspect of the lives of the Malaysians of Islamic faith. "Fundamentalism and intolerance runs very deep in Malay-Muslim society... Muslims have few choices... our life is regulated and regimented," said a political analyst (*Asia Times Online*, 9 Feb. 2005). Yet the laws are not confined within the boundaries of this community.

Despite the saying that morality laws apply only to those of Islamic faith, the overzealousness has spilled over to the communities of other faiths. In Ipoh, a student and his girlfriend were booked for "indecent behaviour" as they held hands and talked in Ipoh Padang (*NST*, 13 April 2003).

Another student was issued a summons for talking with a classmate at the stairway of a library in Ipoh. Those living in metropolitan Kuala Lumpur are not spared. A couple was charged under the FT Parks Bylaws 1981 for holding hands and kissing in the KLCC park in August 2003.

Many consider moral policing a religious duty. Some have argued that the Federal Constitution recognises Islam as the official religion and that since Malaysia has been declared an "Islamic state," the state therefore has a responsibility to enforce Islamic laws on its citizens. Others question the constitutionality and propriety of denying people their privacy, freedom of speech and expression.

Many lawyers of various religious backgrounds are of the opinion that enforcing Islamic laws violates individual fundamental liberties.

Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahbudin, president of the National Council of Women Organisation, believed that moral control through laws could not solve social problems (*Star Online*, 9 March 2005).

Her view was echoed by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who

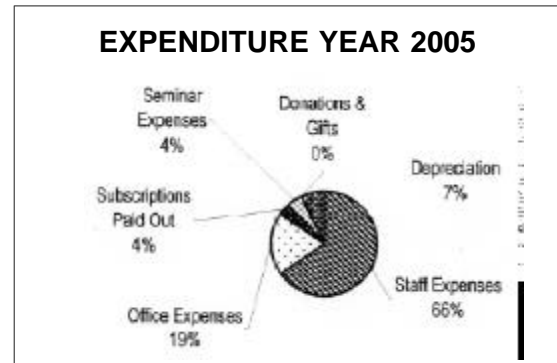
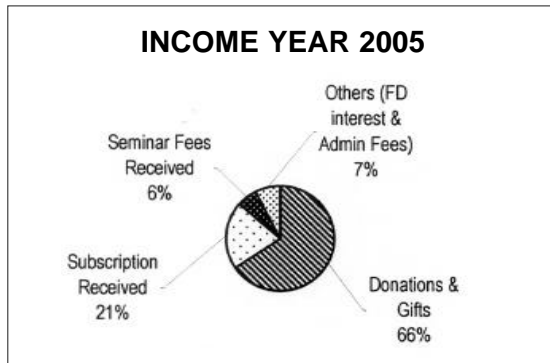


Should public display of affection be outlawed?

• CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



NECF MALAYSIA INCOME & EXPENDITURE 2005



INCOME	ACTUAL 2005
Donations & Gifts	476,906
Subscriptions Received	152,013
Seminar Fees Received	45,760
Others (FD interest & Admin. Fees)	53,625
Total:	728,304
Surplus/Deficit for the year	68,345

EXPENDITURE	ACTUAL 2005
Staff Expenses	431,429
Office Expenses	126,376
Subscriptions Paid Out	25,867
Seminar Expenses	29,465
Donations & Gifts	1,124
Depreciation	45,698
Total:	659,959

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

said, "The most effective way to prevent people from committing crimes and wrongdoings is to instil in them good and noble values instead of coming up with more laws". (*Star Online, 18 April 2005*).

Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, minister in the Prime Minister's Department, was quoted as saying, "We do not want Malaysia to turn into Taliban rule," and that "individual rights regardless of religion or creed" must be respected in the multi-racial society (*Star Online, 25 March 2005*).

The Cabinet had also issued a directive disbanding the Melaka's controversial snoop squad, 4B Youth's Mat Skodeng. Another religious snoop squad was formed in the administrative capital Putrajaya in January and was later disbanded under similar circumstance.

Legislating bylaws to curb indecency is the touchy issue of the day.

On April 3, the Federal Court affirmed the power of the local government to create bylaws to act against "citizens who behave in a disorderly manner in public" (*The Sun*).

In his remark, Chief Justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim seemed to suggest that kissing and hugging in public was a disorderly manner although it was permissible in countries like England. Many wondered whether his comment carried the connotation of religious interpretation of morality and personal conviction.

In response to the ruling, the Bar Council, All Women's Action Society and Human Rights Commission of Malaysia have called the authorities to define indecency.

While the intention may be for upholding good morality, it is subjective in nature, for there are different kinds of morality due to diverse belief systems. Legislating morality based on religious principles would be simply deciding one action is wrong (non-Islamic or non-biblical, etc.) and another is right (Islamic or biblical, etc.).

Whichever principle is applied, the enforcers would be seen as imposing that morality based on certain religious precepts on another who may be of a different faith.

Having said that, laws relating to criminal offences are all moral in nature for they represent a system of morality. Laws against murder, rape and thefts are both moral and religious issues that are found in all cultures. That is why we have this enactment called the Penal Code, a consolidation of law that is related to criminal offences.

NECF Malaysia stresses its stand in upholding morality, for it ensures justice and harmony between individuals and a good society. Nevertheless, we also believe that personal and religious-based morality should not be imposed on others in pluralistic Malaysia.

Recognising that policing relates to crimes, we call for **policing criminality rather than policing morality** and are confident that the Penal Code itself is sufficient to maintain public order and morality.

– Reported by NECF Malaysia Research Department ■

A Christian Perspective of the Ninth Malaysia Plan

By Huang Zheng Ming

On March 31, 2006, the Federal Government tabled the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) in Parliament to great public acclaim. This 524-page document contains the first of three five-year plans to achieve Vision 2020 and its goal of making Malaysia a fully developed country.

Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has said that the 9MP is the centrepiece of his administration and that no other policy implementation task is more important.

What is the 9MP and what are its implications for Christians? This article will briefly sketch out some of its main

the Plan states that:-

“Islam Hadhari was introduced in 2004 as a comprehensive and universal development framework for the nation. The framework was formulated as an approach that enjoins progress and advancement as an imperative for the people, while being rooted in the universal values and injunctions of Islam.”

The statement that Islam Hadhari was introduced as a framework for “the nation” seems to lack a sound factual basis. If it is indeed grounded in reality, then Christians and non-Christians alike should, in the interests of transparency and accountability, seek clarification from their leader as to the exact manner, circumstances and details by which such

contradicts the universal claims that are made.

Five Thrusts

Leaving aside the specificity of the philosophy, the 9MP outlines a National Mission for 24.4 million Malaysians that comprise five thrusts.

The first thrust of the 9MP is to move the economy up the value chain.

This requires two complementary strategies: first, the migration of existing economic activities, such as electrical and electronics, towards higher value-added and technology segments and, second, the establishment of new activities, as in biotechnology, services and agriculture.

The second thrust of the Plan is to

The statement that Islam Hadhari was introduced as a framework for “the nation” seems to lack a sound factual basis.

features and notable points. Those who are more interested in it will obviously want to read the Plan for themselves. A soft copy is available from the following website: <http://www.epu.jpm.my/rm9/RMKe9.htm>

At the heart of the 9MP is a RM220 billion allocation for Federal Government development expenditure over the next five years. The Plan specifies the objectives and strategies that will guide the government in spending this amount.

Also central to the Plan are policies and regulatory requirements that do not have an explicit cost but which are nonetheless critical to the achievement of specific goals. These include measures to redistribute employment, income and wealth along ethnic lines and enhance public service delivery.

Islam Hadhari's role in 9MP

At the outset, it is important for the Christian community to note that there is an anomaly early in the 9MP. Page 9 of

a framework was adopted by the nation.

The idea that something can be both intrinsically universal and particular all at the same time is, at the very least, a debatable one. In no way can it be considered as beyond question and an accepted fact.

Indeed, in a multi-religious society like Malaysia, the association between universal values (no matter how desirable) with one particular religion (no matter which one) should be considered, at best, inappropriate and, at worst, insensitive.

The assertion that non-Muslims should embrace the principles because they are not specific to Muslims is especially tenuous when the above statement is compared with another on the same page: “Islam Hadhari is an effort to bring the people back to basics and back to the fundamentals, as prescribed in the Quran and the Hadith that form the foundation of Islamic civilisation.”

If this indeed accurately describes the true intentions, then it quite clearly

raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation and nurture a ‘first-class’ mentality. The primary means of doing so is via the education system, namely by improving the access and quality of secondary and tertiary institutions, nurturing top quality research and development and innovation, and by harnessing the efforts of women and youth, and the development of strong moral values.

Christians should strongly support both of these thrusts and participate to the fullest extent possible. Many are already involved in services and the New Economy and the Plan provides for more opportunities in such areas.

Education is also something that has been one of the core values of the Christian community, especially one that avoids an over-emphasis on text books, tuition and examinations.

The third thrust of the 9MP is to address socio-economic inequalities

• CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

OA not second-class citizens

Orang Asli (OA) Christians must be spiritually, economically and academically strong so that their Church can be independent and self-supporting. When they are strong, they are not afraid of external threats or being taken advantage of by other groups, Alfred Tais said to a group of OA pastors and leaders at an OA consultation in April.

The NECF Malaysia Executive Secretary (BM) said those ministering to the OA churches must help OA parents to see the importance of education so that they will push their children to study.

"Most OA parents don't care if their children drop out of school early. If this continues, they will remain backward," Tais pointed out at the consultation, themed *Arah Tuju Pelayanan Orang Asli* (the future of the OA ministry).

Tais said there were many people with the expertise to provide skill and training to the OA in agriculture.

The next speaker, Kon Onn Sien, took this up further in his message,



"Developing the OA economy in the long run". He said those ministering to the OA should not just bring the message of transforming lives but bring economic development to their village as well.

Though the OA has no money, they have their land which they can develop. Kon said his foundation, Yayasan Kajian dan Pembangunan Masyarakat (Foundation for Community Studies and Development), of which he is the managing director, was willing to help train the OA in developing their land.

He added that the Church could further help the OA with marketing the produce of the OA farmers to improve their earnings. "For example, in Jerantut, the Orang Aslis sell their D24 durian to traders for RM1 per kilo. The traders then re-sell the durian at RM8 per kilo. Imagine how much more the Orang Asli can earn if they are helped in this area," he said.

He urged the OA to change their



Pr Miun Amat from SIB Tanjung Malim (standing) presenting his group's report after discussion.

mindset of dependency and said when their economy is strong, they can then run their own church activities without external help.

The last speaker, lawyer Lim Heng Seng, said the OA must know their rights or they will always be living in fear. Speaking on "The Rights of Orang Asli", he said they must know their rights under the "Akta Orang Asli 1954" (Orang Asli Acts 1954).

In addition, they must know their right to freedom of religion according to the Federal Constitution. "You are free to build your church in your *kampung*. You are free to practise your religion. Also, according to the Constitution, you are not second-class citizens and you must speak up whenever you face problem with your land," he urged. ■

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

constructively and productively.

Importantly, the Plan approach in resolving socio-economic imbalances is to "focus on capacity building and competitiveness, taking into account the lessons of the past and the pressures of globalisation and liberalisation".

The fourth thrust of the 9MP is that of improving the standard and sustainability of the quality of life. This takes the form of meeting the needs for housing, health, transport, energy and water, as well as culture and sports.

Christians must stand for social justice. That we have not done so to a greater extent is reflective of the lack of teaching that our gospel is as much a social as a spiritual one.

We can have no quarrel that the poor and marginalised must be given a hand up into the economic mainstream. Our

reason is not the negative fear of social instability but the positive opportunity to show love and concern. The emphasis on eradicating poverty, intra-ethnic inequalities and care for such groups as the elderly, disabled, single mothers and orphans all resonate sympathetically with the Christian agenda for the past two millennia.

Where we would take issue with the 9MP is the unnecessary identification of socio-economic inequalities with race, and by implication religion. The ability to improve one's standard of living should be based squarely on necessity and not ethnicity. The Christian premise is one that regards all as equal in the sight of Almighty God.

Christians must also be uncompromising against corruption, waste and inefficiency. As is well known, however, a large part of these problems emanate from policies that break the

relationship between work and reward.

The removal of ethical incentives is contrary to moral teachings of any religion, regardless of Christianity or Islam.

Fifth and finally, the 9MP seeks to strengthen institutional and implementation capacity of the government by promoting good governance and enhancing the public service delivery system.

Needless to say, policies without implementation are sterile and fruitless. Thus, the inclusion of a culture of public service is an appropriate antidote to the present public services culture.

Christ Jesus' analogy of the vine, branches and the bearing of fruit should fully inform not only our lives but also policies and plans. ■

This article is contributed by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.

Transforming The Church Through Mentoring

LEADERSHIP development is key to the transformation of the church, and mentoring happens to be a critical part of that development.

“Mentoring is an intentional effort to build leaders through intimate relationships,” said Dr John Ng who conducted a recent mentoring workshop jointly organised by NECF Malaysia and Eagles Communication (Singapore).

The Eagles Executive Vice-President said, “Leaders are naturally lonely people and mentoring provides a way for them to develop friendship and companionship. Many leaders have fallen out for lack of accountability.”

Over 120 people comprising pastors and church leaders who attended the interactive workshop gave it a high rating in terms of usefulness in helping them consider a ministry in mentoring.

Dr Ng kicked off the workshop by giving participants a biblical perspective of mentoring. Since mentoring is a relationship, he used Paul’s relationship with Timothy as a model of the kind of relationship that should be emulated.

According to him, mentoring is “a trust and synergistic relationship that seeks to support and develop individuals in their personal growth to be a God-centred person, holistic personal development and improved performance.”

In any relationship, there is always the fear of failure and breakdown in the relationship. “Leaders therefore need to learn how to recover from failed relationship. Paul was a good example of a leader who never stopped building relationship even after experiencing failed relationship. He realised people would fail and disappoint him, yet he found strength to recover

and risk again because he realised that was the way to pass his legacy,” Dr Ng pointed out.

He then moved on to the purpose or goal of mentoring, which is learning (for the mentor) and helping people to learn (for the mentoree). “How do people learn?” he asked the participants. Some of the answers were: observing, asking relevant questions and imitating or role modeling.

Dr Ng felt role modeling was a critical aspect of learning and he related the story of Roger Bannister, the first man to run one mile in under four minutes in 1954. Six months after his historic success, three people broke the record 26 times. Why was it impossible before Roger Bannister accomplish the feat?

“The reason is that runners copied his (Bannister’s) techniques. – where he practised, what he ate, what he did and how often did he do it and so on. That was role-modeling at work,” he stressed.

Good mentors must provide a climate that is conducive for growth. “You can’t change people. You can only provide an environment for change,” Dr Ng said.

He then took participants through the Mentoring Framework, which provides a structure to start a mentoring relationship. The framework addresses issues such as the goals and values of mentoring, the types of partnership to base the relationship on, the structure or system of mentoring and what obstacles to expect in a mentoring relationship.

The session was a beneficial exercise as it provided participants time to discuss the issues addressed in the framework. ■



The engaging Dr Ng... “Good mentors must provide a climate that is conducive for growth.”

From Crisis to Character

IN the Chinese language, crisis means danger as well as opportunity. Similarly, in Christian leadership, God can use crisis to help transform a leader, according to Dr Herbert Tan. He was speaking to some 60 pastors and leaders of BM churches in the peninsula at a two-day conference in March organised by the NECF Malaysia Bahasa Malaysia Commission.

Dr Tan urged the participants to therefore, view crises positively. The leadership development consultant with Malaysia Campus Crusade for Christ, conducted all three sessions aimed at

helping participants think through the process of leadership development.

In his first session, he explored the framework of leadership development – why it is vital that churches have programmes to develop their leaders and the structures of a good development programme.

His second session dealt with how God uses crisis to shape the heart of a leader. “How should we respond to crises?” he asked. “We ought to look to God with joy and gratitude, and accept the crisis with the attitude of ‘What are You teaching me?’ rather than ‘Why do

You allow it to happen?’ ”

The final session touched on the issue of commitment. He said leaders must be committed to setting and keeping their priorities, and developing their potential.

On setting priority, Dr Tan recommended that they place the family high on the list. “Leadership begins at home. How we lead our family members will determine how well we lead outside the home,” he stressed.

Leaders must also be committed to developing their potential. “But while it is good to have the best development programmes, we can only develop to our fullest potential if we have an intimate relationship with Christ,” he concluded.

Current Concerns for your prayers

Conscience needed for MPs

Should MPs be allowed to vote according to their conscience even if it means supporting an Opposition motion? Over 92% said yes while a paltry 1.9% said no in response to an online poll by *The Star*.

Nearly 3,000 readers participated in the poll, conducted in response to the resignation by Johor Baru MP Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad on May 4 as Chairman of the Backbenchers Club after he failed to get backing from his fellow members to support a DAP motion.

The Opposition party had moved to refer Jasin MP Datuk Mohd Said Yusof, over a *New Straits Times* report, to the Rights and Privileges Committee for asking the Customs department to “close one eye” over an illegal import of sawn timber from Indonesia. Mohd Said later admitted he owns the forwarding agency that imported the timber.

Following Shahrir’s resignation, the Prime Minister reminded all party members to stick to party rules, one of which is they cannot support Opposition motions.

He also said that since the Dewan Rakyat speaker has rejected the motion for Mohd Said to be investigated, the Umno Supreme Council did not discuss the matter at their meeting on May 8.

Pray for the PM and the government who have so often said it wanted to weed out corruption. Pray that God will sensitise their conscience and embolden them to do the righteous thing, as what Shahrir had done. ■

Lina Joy’s MyKad case

There’s hope yet for Lina Joy, who has been trying for years to delete the word “Islam” from her MyKad. Originally named Azlina Jailani, she managed to

change her name (at the National Registration Department) to Lina Joy in 1988 after converting to Christianity.

The department (NRD) however refused her application to delete “Islam” from her identity card because it felt that would mean changing her religious status, and it had no jurisdiction to do so without proper advice from the Syariah Court or other Islamic religious authorities.

Lina took her case to court and on April 13, the court granted leave for the Federal Court to decide whether the Syariah Court has the exclusive jurisdiction to hear cases on Muslims who renounced their religion. The apex court will also rule if a Muslim needs to produce a declaration from the Syariah Court before the NRD will delete the word “Islam” from an applicant’s identity card.

Chief Justice of the Federal Court Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim said leave was allowed because a novel issue of public importance was raised.

The appeal will be confined to three main issues:

- Whether the NRD was legally entitled to require someone to produce a certificate or a declaration or an order from the Syariah Court before deleting “Islam” from an applicant’s identity card;
- Whether the NRD has correctly construed its powers under the National Registration Regulations 1990 to impose the above requirement when it is not expressly provided for in the regulations;
- Whether the landmark case *Soon Singh vs Perkim Kedah* – which held that Syariah Courts have the authority over the civil courts to hear cases of Muslims renouncing their religion – was correctly decided. The court has yet to fix a date for the hearing.

Pray for the right judges to be appointed to hear Lina’s case. Pray that judges will uphold the supremacy of the secular law and have an open mind in interpreting the law. Pray for God to strengthen Joy that indeed, she will have unspeakable joy amidst her trial. ■

Expect more complicated race relations

Malaysians should expect race relations to get more complicated as mixed marriages and conversions become widespread in a multi-racial society, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said.

However, there is nothing to be alarmed about as long as all parties plan for it and consult each other in finding remedies, the *New Straits Times* reported on April 4.

The DPM cited the case of Everest climber M. Moorthy as a recent issue where racial tensions were heightened but in the end resolved calmly.

Echoing the PM’s stand, he said, “We will look at everything without having to amend the Constitution. This is the principle.”

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has stated that the contentious Article 121(1A), which separates the jurisdiction of the Syariah court from civil courts, will not be amended.

Meanwhile, a minister has said that the Government may make it compulsory for non-Muslims who convert to Islam to inform their family to prevent a tussle for their remains after their death. This and the question of maintenance, custody and the division of assets involving converts were among several issues being scrutinised by the Attorney-General’s Chambers, which had been appointed to look into the relevant laws and make recommendations to the Government to ensure fair and just solutions for both the convert and his civil-law family.

Pray for the AG and his team who are “fine-tuning” measures to ensure justice for all parties in contentious issues involving Muslim and non-Muslim parties. Pray that God will grant them wisdom and a sense of urgency to speedily complete their delicate task. ■

Current Concerns for your prayers

Religious Sensitivities

The government will use the Sedition Act against non-Muslims who “incite the sentiments” of Muslims, warned Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz, according to a *Malaysiakini* report.

Speaking to reporters after receiving a memorandum in support of the amended Islamic Family Law (IFL) at the Parliament building on March 20, he said the government has however no plans to draft a law to prohibit non-Muslims from raising matters or questions related to Islam.

“This is a harmonious country and we respect one another, especially on religious matters...Non-Muslims should understand there are some matters that they cannot touch or utter,” he said.

He argued that Muslim Malaysians have never interfered in or ridiculed other religions, and that non-Muslims should therefore apply similar principles in matters involving Islam.

Pray that the minister’s remarks are not misinterpreted. Pray that those who are working towards improving the lives of people, including Muslims, will have the courage to continue speaking against injustice. ■

Mafias in Malaysia

An alternative governing system similar to the powerful Italian Mafia will one day replace the existing government if corruption continues to thrive, warned Megat Najmuddin Khas, president of Malaysian Institute of Corporate Governance and Federation of Public Listed Companies.

A *Malaysiakini* report on April 24 quoted him as saying the legitimate order of business will “be swallowed up” by a growing underground economy spurred

by corruption.

“Gambling is among the top three industries within this alternative economy which competes with the real economy.

During the last World Cup, Malaysia was the seventh biggest betting nation on the planet with illegal bookies making a kill, further enriching the local Mafia,” he said at a forum cum dialogue organised by the Malaysian Integrity Institute (MII) in Kuala Lumpur.

He also cited Malaysia’s notoriety as the biggest exporter of illegal CDs, video CDs and DVDs. “Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi...is trying hard to fight corruption. But he’s all alone and he can’t do it by himself.”

Pray there will be no let-up in the fight against corruption. Pray for the media to continue highlighting issues on corruption so that the anti-corruption battle continues to be visible and burn the conscience of politicians, civil servants, businessmen and everyone else. ■

Pastor commits suicide

Rev. Jayaraj Devadason Sundram, 43, coordinator of the Perak Pastors Fellowship, was found dead on April 6. Police ruled he committed suicide and found three notes that explained how he had stood guarantor for four men who took loans from loan sharks.

The late reverend was said to have suffered depression for some time. Pastors and leaders carry the weighty responsibility of caring for the flock. Managing people is a highly stressful vocation. The late Rev. Jayaraj’s case is a stern reminder to us that we need to continually uphold our pastors and leaders in prayer and affirmation.

Pray for God’s comfort and peace to be upon the family of the deceased, that they will stand firm in their faith and experience God’s unconditional love and loving Christian support during this time of grief. ■

Remove bad cops

The PM has directed the police force to get rid of “bad apples” or take action against them to regain the public’s trust and respect, *The Sun* reported on April 17. At the same time, he called for a stop to police bashing, saying it wasn’t fair to penalise the entire police force because of a few bad hats.

The public’s perception that the police is corrupted is not without substance. “Macam mana nak tolong?” (How can I help?) has often been spewed by policemen fishing for bribes that the phrase has become synonymous with the policeman.

Let us diligently pray for the police force as it attempts to purge itself of the toxin in its system. Pray that citizens will see that it is their duty to stop corruption by not giving bribes. Corruption is a two-way traffic. If there is no given, the cycle will soon cease. ■

Wise spending

Malaysians were stunned when the PM called off the “scenic bridge” project three weeks after works began.

The RM620 million-bridge was to replace the causeway linking Malaysia and Singapore. The Government now has to pay compensation, reported to be in the sum of RM100 million, to the contractor who has been awarded the road project from the CIQ (Customs, Immigration and Quarantine) complex to the current causeway.

Parliamentarians fear the government’s decision to scrap the bridge project would render the RM1.2 billion CIQ complex a white elephant. Pray for the Government to be prudent in spending taxpayers’ money.

Pray that God will place righteous people to be in charge of the nation’s finances. ■



Adoption And The Christian

By VICTORIA Y.K. NG (Vicky)

Christian couples without children of their own and even older single women with strong maternal disposition who are financially stable should be encouraged to adopt children.

The main concern for the adoptive parents is that the child may one day discover that he is an adopted child and may face an identity crisis. However, this need not be the case if the child is loved, cherished and brought up as if he was the natural born child.

Where there is no discrimination in treatment between a child of the marriage and the adopted child, the adopted child will feel secure, loved and accepted in the family. In many instances the fear that the adopted child will trace his roots and locate his natural parents to

the point of forsaking his adoptive parents is unfounded.

In fact it would be advisable to let the child know (when he is at an age to understand) that he is a special child, hand-picked, chosen and loved by mum and dad so much so that they **chose to adopt him**. To my mind this voluntary disclosure would be less traumatic for the child than for him to discover later on "by accident" that he is adopted.

Honesty and transparency in dealing with the issue at the outset will probably win the respect and devotion of the adopted child. There is no need to cover up. Children are innately sensitive and they know when they are loved and cherished

by their adoptive parents and treated as if they were natural born.

There are orphans, abused and unwanted children out there who long to grow up in a wholesome, warm and loving family environment.

Childless couples and mature single women who love the Lord and who have the means of support are in an ideal position to lavish their love, care and nurture on these otherwise neglected children. It is a long-term investment in these young lives that will surely reap rewards in eternity.

For what greater legacy can a Christian parent leave behind than children that love, follow and serve the true and living God.

Vicky is a practising lawyer, deaconess and Vice-Chairman of Interserve Malaysia. In the next issue, she will talk about the legal procedures involved in adoption. Her story below clearly shows the importance of knowing the laws and abiding by them.

Ignorance of Laws Leads to Heartbreak

PATRICK AND AI NI (not their real names) have been married for five years. The couple longed for a child to hold and cherish, but Ai Ni was unable to conceive.

Ai Ni had consulted numerous gynaecologists and decided that she should go for fertility treatment. If things did not work out, the couple considered adopting a child from China or even Vietnam.

Just as she was a month into her fertility treatment, a well-meaning friend introduced her to a stranger, one Madam Wong, who was an old hand at arranging children for adoption but at a price!

Most of her contacts were single mothers pregnant out of wedlock. She promised Ai Ni that she would take care of all the details – procure a child for adoption, obtain the relevant birth certificate complete with a MyKid to boot with minimum hassle!

Why even Patrick and Ai Ni would be spared a face-to-face encounter with the natural parents of the child. Even better, when the child grew up she will never know that she was an adopted child! Madam Wong's proposal was just too good to resist. It would be a dream come true for the

couple. But little did they realise that the transaction they were about to enter into would be tainted with illegality from the start and lead to complications later on. The whole exercise was actually fraudulent!

Three months into the illegal adoption, baby Cherie brought so much joy and fulfillment to the whole family. She was indeed a treasure and bundle of endless delight.

Patrick and Ai Ni decided to take her for a holiday to Melbourne to meet her brother and family. So, they took baby Cherie to the Immigration Department to apply for an international passport.

At the department, the officer took one look at baby Cherie, and knew something was amiss. She didn't quite look like her parents and certainly her complexion was much darker than her purported parents. He was suspicious.

When Patrick and Ai Ni were quizzed, they struggled to provide credible answers (in fact they were forced to lie as one lie invariably leads to another).

The officer was not persuaded. Instead, he referred them to the National Registration Department and the couple is now under investigation by the relevant authorities.

COMING UP

“East Meets West” Dance Concert

- ? **Date: July 17 (Monday)**
- ? **Place: MCA Main Auditorium, Kuala Lumpur**

THE NECF Foundation is organising a dance concert, which is expected to be an electrifying, first-of-its-kind concert in Malaysia as it features four Christian dance companies – two from America, one from the Philippines and one from Malaysia.

Themed “East Meets West”, the concert will marry “the excellence of the east” and “the best of the west” to present a message of beauty, hope and joy. The concert is held to celebrate the foundation’s second anniversary and NECF is honoured to have Selah Repertory Dance Theatre and Ad Deum



One of the dancers from America executes an acrobatic move in the air. Audience can expect lots of such action at the concert.

Dance Company (America); Kaloob Dance Theatre (the Philippines); and Christian Dance Fellowship of Malaysia which is co-organising the event.

Entrance to the concert is by invitation with a donation of RM50 per invite.

Contact NECF office at 03-77278227 to get your invitation cards.

Doulos Sailing In

- ? **Penang: June 7-13**
- ? **Port Klang: June 28-July 31**
- ? **Pasir Gudang: Aug 3-16**
- ? **Kuantan: Aug 17 to 28**



CATCH the world’s oldest ocean passenger ship which also carries the world’s largest floating bookstore with half a million books covering 6,000 titles.

Built in 1914 and just two years younger than the Titanic, the ship’s visit this time around will focus on Christian youths – challenging them to a deeper relationship with God and inspiring them with a greater passion for evangelism and mission.

Contact Penang: 012-9766435 or doulos.penang@gbaships.org; Port Klang: 012-9766702 or doulos.portklang@gbaships.org

Prayer Booklets

THE NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission has decided to focus this year’s 40-Day National Fast and Prayer on the nation and government.

Hence, this year’s prayer booklets will guide participants in interceding for the various government



departments, state governments and national issues such as corruption, national unity and AIDS. Like the past years, the booklets come in the four major languages – English, Bahasa, Chinese and Tamil, whereas the children version is available in English, Bahasa and Chinese. Churches are encouraged to make their booklet orders early to avoid last-minute delivery problems.

Children’s Prayer Conference & Rally



- ? **Date: Aug 21-22 (Mon. & Tues.)**
- ? **Place: PJEFC, Heritage Centre, Section 13, Petaling Jaya**

THE 2nd national Children’s Prayer Conference will be held during the school holiday for children aged five to 12.

The theme “Why Me?” is taken from Jeremiah 1:5 and will help the young participants’ to hear God’s voice, know His purposes and do them.

There will also be a special session on the Holy Spirit. All teaching sessions will be conducted by Pr Sam Phun who has over 22 years of experience working with children in churches and schools.

The conference, organised by the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission, will end with a prayer rally where the children will spend time interceding for the nation. The registration fee of RM25 includes meals, materials and a special doorgift.

National Prayer Conference

Meanwhile, this year’s National Prayer Conference and rally (adults) will move stage from the Klang Valley to Johor Baru to benefit our brethren in south Peninsular Malaysia.

The speakers is Bishop Efraim Tendero (national director of the Philippines Council of Evangelical Churches).

More details in the next issue.



Pahang

THIS year's *Lighting Up Our Nation* programme, held in conjunction with Merdeka Day, will focus on praying for our own nation. Berita NECF will highlight in each issue a state for intercession. Last issue, we focussed on Terengganu and in this one, we look at Pahang, a state famous for the three resort mountains and beautiful beach. We hope that the information provided through "State Spot" will stir up more passionate intercession.



**STATISTICS (MALAYSIA
STATISTICS DEPARTMENT, 2005)**

Population: 1,427,000 (est.)
Ethnic groups: Malay 68.68%, Chinese 16.22%, Other Bumiputera 4.8%, Indian 4.65%, Others 0.67%, Non-citizens (Indonesians) 4.98%

Religious Breakdown (2000):
 Islam 73.8%, Buddhism 13.7%, Tribal 3.4%, Christianity 1.2%, Hinduism 4.4%, Taoism/Confucianism 2.5%, Others 1%

Incidence of poverty (2004): 4%,
 Hardcore 1%

immoral behaviour and 'unislamic,' including religious teachings that are regarded as deviations from the mainstream.

PAHANG, the largest state in the Peninsular Malaysia, is home to many of the country's major tourist attractions, including Taman Negara (the country's largest national park), Tasik Bera and Tasik Chini, and the three highlands – Genting Highlands, Cameron Highlands and Fraser's Hill. Tourism remains the state's main earner.

Islamisation, Religious Freedom and Rights

Apostasy or *murtad* (a Muslim renouncing his faith) is a punishable offence according to section 185 of the Administration of the Religion of Islam and the Malay Custom of Pahang Enactment 1982, and Pahang Islamic Family Law Enactment 1987.

The penalty is a fine not exceeding RM5,000 or imprisonment not exceeding three years and whipping of no more than six strokes. The state also enacted in 1989 laws to control and restrict the propagation of non-Islamic religions among the Muslims. However, these laws have thus far not been enforced.

The Syariah law covers a wide range of activities to outlaw what is considered

In February 2005, 95 deviant groups were identified by the state government. Actions were taken against 73 groups. The sentence handed down by the Pahang Syariah Court that June surprised many as it was the first time in Malaysian Syariah history that Muslims were sentenced to caning for consuming alcohol. Ironically, there were no provisions for the manner of execution with caning. The offenders were also fined RM5000 each.

This February, 65 students of a secondary school in Temerloh were disciplined for not wearing the school-approved headscarves. Responding to the incident, the Minister of Education affirmed the public that wearing the *tudung* (headscarf) was a matter of choice.

Observers have said that the trend in recent years not only expressed the religiosity of the state authorities, but also indicated that "the religious bureaucracy was taking for granted the constant proclamation of Malaysia being an Islamic country." Others believed that the authorities were under increasing pressure to follow religious laws as the political parties strove to prove their Islamic credentials.

Such religious fervour has spilled over to communities of other faiths, even though the relationship among all religious groups is generally amicable. The Orang Asli (OA) community seems to be most affected.

In September 2003, an OA church building in Kampung Pasu, Temerloh, was demolished by the district Land

Office. (The Federal Government approved in October 2005 a lump sum to compensate the Kampung Pasu Christians and a new church was built.) The Sungai Ruai OA Christians in Raub received a notice demanding them to tear down their 'illegal' church or face penalty of RM10,000 fine or one-year imprisonment or both. The Semelai people's place of worship in Kampung Ganoh, Rompin, was also issued with a similar order in May 2004.

Other than matters of religious freedom, the OA community also faces long-term contention with the state government on land issues. Intensive harvesting for timber has not only caused an industrial slowdown and major environmental damage, it has also impinged on the livelihood of the OA villagers. Logging companies continue to encroach on their ancestral land.

In 2003, a group of OA was arrested for attempting to block logging trucks from entering their land. (It was then reported that they were released on bail, and the logging project was cancelled.) Last year, the Semoq Beri people had their land encroached upon by another highway project.

For many years, the OA community of Kampung Bukit Rok and Kampung Ibam have locked in a scuffle with the authorities over logging on their land. They finally won the battle after the recent April meeting with the authorities.

Mismanaged tourism development in the famous Tasik Chini has adversely

• SEE NEXT PAGE

affected both the lake ecosystem and the livelihood of Jakun people. Although the Chief Minister has vowed to protect the green lung and push for sustainable development, the uncertainty surrounding OA land ownership has made them vulnerable to exploitation.

Social issues and others

Incidents of date rape and consensual sex involving teens have alarmed the state authorities.

Habitual gambling gravely affects the social and family structures, especially of the Chinese community. Drug addiction among the youth remains a chronic problem, particularly among those who are under the Felda plantation schemes (*April 8, 2005, The Star Online*).

Although the state government has earlier refuted SUHAKAM's claim that it has neglected the wellbeing of the OA community, the people continue to live in poverty and remain largely uneducated.

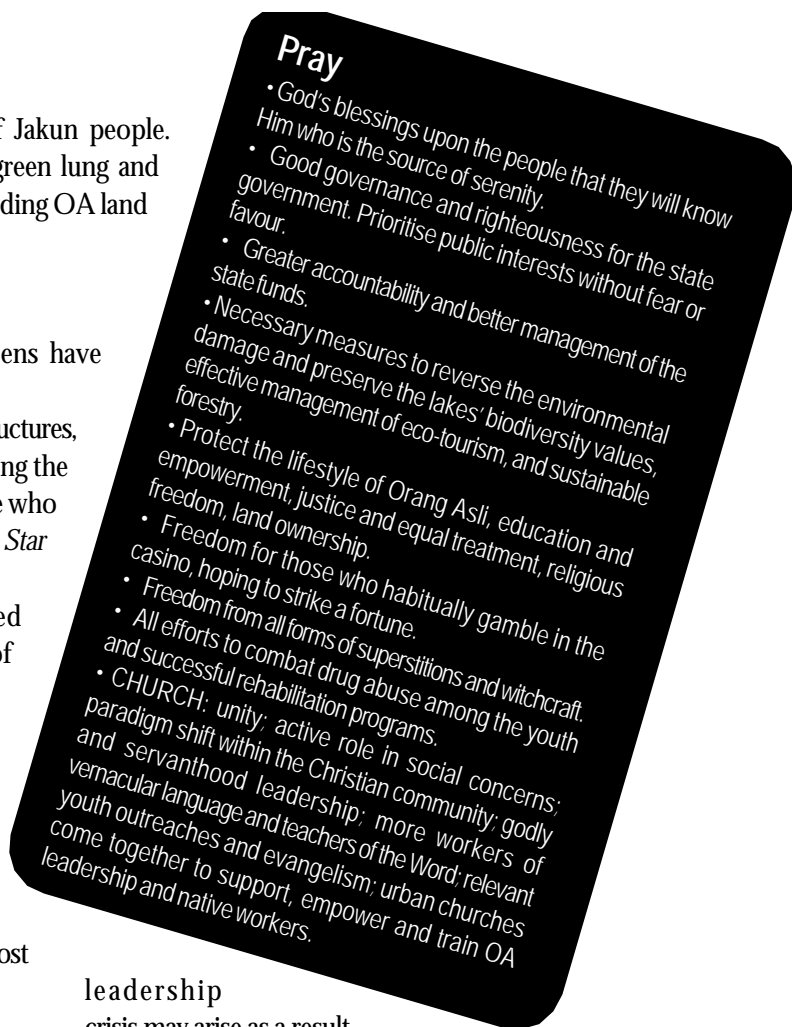
The latest state government statistics show that more than half of OA students drop out after primary school; 11,825 OA families are listed as hardcore poor and 3,347 as poor (*Jan 26, NST*).

Despite its rich natural resources, Pahang was identified in Dec 2004 by the Finance Ministry as one of the seven 'almost bankrupt' states due to its high financial deficit.

The Church

Many churches in Pahang are vernacular in nature, particularly in smaller towns where the majority are of either Presbyterian or Methodist background. There are about 25 churches in Kuantan itself, mostly English-speaking, and 10 of which are actively involved in the pastors' fellowship. Out of the fellowship emerged the Rapha Children's home, the only Christian-run home in Kuantan. The bigger churches here have an average of 200 or more members.

Churches in Pahang have often complained about insufficient manpower (lack of full-time pastors and church workers). The



leadership

crisis may arise as a result

of the 'priesthood' mentality within the Christian community, which leads to a general unacceptability of the function of lay leadership. The demand for high living standard may have also caused many to shy away from going into fulltime ministries.

In general, churches in Pahang are active in evangelism and able to work well together. Two major hindrances in outreaches appear to be the misperception on Christianity being a 'white man's religion, and deep-rooted idol and ancestral worship. There is certainly room for improvement in discipleship and leadership training, and that members must move out of the comfort zone to make an impact in the community. ■

From the rising of the sun to the going down...

ON June 4 Sunday, the world will start praying as the sun rises in the East (Fiji) in their different time zones until it sets in the West (USA Hawaii). Throughout the world, over 200 million Christians will gather in repentance and prayer at stadiums, churches, market squares and other appointed places in the Global Day of Prayer (GDOP) event.

Even in "closed" countries, Christians will find creative ways to meet on this special day.

This year, Malaysian Christians will for

the first time join their brethren in this earth-shaking event organised globally by the International Prayer Council.

NECF Malaysia is mobilising Malaysian Christians to gather at the PJEFC, Heritage Centre at 3, Jalan 13/6, Petaling Jaya (same row as Dutch Lady and UTAR) at 8.00pm.

GDOP was born from "Transformation Africa", a prayer event in South Africa in 2001, which saw 45,000 Christians gathered at a stadium in Cape Town to pray for their country.



Four years later, 155 other nations throughout the world join South Africa in a global day of prayer on May 15, 2005. More than 200 million Christians participated in the event.

Don't miss out this year's gathering.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



PALESTINE

SINCE the militant Hamas group won the alestinian elections in January, tension has been brewing between Hamas and the former ruling party, Fatah.

In April, violence clashes and mass protests across Palestinian areas erupted after a Hamas leader accused Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (of the Fatah group) of treachery. Palestinians appear to be on the verge of a civil war but both parties had acted quickly to calm the hostilities.

Pray for the many people, especially our Christian brethren, who are suffering because of the violence. Pray for God's sovereign will to be accomplished in this trouble-plagued land. ■

SUDAN

MORE than 200,000 people in Sudan's Darfur region are not getting the food they need to survive and some 650,000 people are beyond the reach of aid workers. Jan Egeland, United Nations Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, told the Security Council, "We need a government that enables us to work and does not create obstacles to our work. We need a guerrilla (force) that does not specialise in hijacking relief trucks and fighting each other and displacing new people, which has happened in the past few weeks. And we need funding."

More than two million people have sought refuge in huge camps since the genocide in 2003. But only 20 percent of relief work in Darfur has been funded this year, Egeland said. More than two million people have been killed and more than four million displaced during the most recent 20-year civil war mainly between the Sudanese government and black African tribes.

Pray for God to open doors for food and aid to reach the suffering, and protection for all the aid workers. ■

EUROPE

ACROSS Europe the number of children being born to unmarried couples has increased by 600 percent over the past 35 years to almost 30 percent of all babies, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*. For example, in Sweden, 56% of the overall birth is outside of marriage. France follows with 48%; Britain 42% and Germany 28%. (Statistics taken from the European Union's official statistics office at Eurostat.)

A majority of the governments across Europe, a traditionally Christian-majority continent, seem to simply state that the changing trend is just a sign of the times.

Dr Peter Brierley of *Christian Research* has stated that if British unions break up more quickly and more often than marriages apply throughout the continent, then the increasing number of single-parent families in Europe will mean governments will have to rethink policy on a wide range of issues, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*.

Particular concerns are the strains that will be placed on childcare facilities, employment for single mothers, social and educational needs of children of single parents. In addition, many European countries are already strained by offering state welfare schemes, and the increase could destabilise the current systems.

Pray for churches in these areas to be firm but loving in its stand on the sanctity of heterosexual marriage. Pray for churches to reach out in love to the needy single parents. ■

EGYPT

COPTIC Christians and Muslims have clashed in Alexandria, Egypt, in April after a Coptic worshipper was stabbed to death in church. Several others were wounded in attacks at several churches.

Egyptian officials have blamed the

attacks on extremists, but Coptic Christians say the government is not doing enough to protect them.

According to Dr. Monir Dowoud, president of the International Christian Union, Copts in Egypt have been the victims of severe human rights abuses and oppression for many years.

Several days after the attacks, the Egyptian government announced it had smashed a terror cell planning terror attacks on tourist targets, a gas pipeline near Cairo as well as Muslim and Christian religious leaders.

But this cell is only the tip of the iceberg. On April 25, a triple bomb attack ripped apart a Sinai beach resort at the height of the tourist season, killing at least 24 people and injuring more than 80, many of them foreigners. Police has arrested several people.

Pray for Egypt's Church, that the Holy Spirit will give Coptic Christians boldness to proclaim their faith and the mind of Christ to forgive their enemies. Pray the witness of Christians will be to the glory and praise of God and pray the perpetrators of violence will tire of continual bloodshed and seek the Prince of Peace. ■

GERMANY

CHURCHES and ministries across Germany are gearing up to take part in the World Cup festivities this June with a host of evangelistic outreach events to bring the Gospel to thousands of football fans.

They have united to form a new network which includes national and international Christian sports ministries under the name of Kickoff2006.

Kickoff2006 will facilitate various projects to serve the spiritual needs of athletes and family members, the visitors and spectators to Germany and the local residents during the event. Pray for unity and joy for our German brethren. ■