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of Malaysia

Berita NECF



Editorial

Hope in the Consolation



Hope fills the nation after the March 8 election. However, for some, this hope has slowly eroded to nagging fear with the unfolding of volatile events that have come upon the country wave after wave soon after the “tsunami”.

From crises with the Royalties to internal spats within the political parties and widespread rumours of a potential change of government, our nation has probably never seen such suspense in its 50-year history. Malaysians wake up each morning wondering what seismic event will hit the day.

During the pre-election period, Malaysian Christians have prayed intensely for the election of upright, just and caring leaders. While we humbly rejoice with God’s affirmative response to our prayers, let us be careful not to be triumphalistic, as if we have finally reached the end of a long road.

No, the road ahead is still long and winding. Let us continue to pray against the tentacles of corruption and injustice that our newly-elected leaders (some of them, at least) – so desirous to do the right and just things – will have to fend off as they carry out their duties.

Many are hopeful that the political change will help to establish our nation, but we have to accept that issues of justice, social ills and corruption – consequences of human weaknesses – will continue to plague us. After all, we live in a tainted world system ruled by the Prince of darkness.

It will therefore be naive to expect all the wrongs righted in a short span of time. Or to make the mistake of putting all our hope on man to solve all our woes, just like the Israelites did in the time of Prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 8).

Samuel was old and had made his sons judges in the land. Unlike Samuel, “his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.” (1 Sam. 8:3). Disillusioned and embittered (and rightly so), the people pressed for a king to rule over them. They were insecure about the future because Samuel was old, and they had no confidence in his immoral sons.

Were they wrong to feel insecure? Surely not. But did they err in asking for a king? Scripture says they sinned in so doing because when Samuel told God about it, He replied, “Heed the voice of the people in all that

they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”

God was displeased with the people because at the heart of their demand was their rejection of His rule over them. But one may argue that they were only rejecting Samuel’s sons, and quite correctly, for they were a corrupt lot. However, God saw their tainted motive deep in their hearts. They used Samuel’s sons as a cover-up. In truth, they wanted to be like the other nations which had kings.

A king, not God, would give them the mental security and

Continued on page 4...

Inside this Issue

Chairman: Arise!	2
Changing Guards at NECF	3
Farewell Mr Boler	5
MyKad Woes Over “Bin”	5
Bahasa Benediction	6
Pointless to Pray?	7
Enough for All	9
Free to Return	10
Land, land, everywhere	12
State Spot – Sabah	14

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Chairman's Message



By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

Arise!

Compassionate Church

As we flip open the pages of our newspapers or turn on our televisions each day, we hear and see the daily barrages of news of tragedies – the ongoing food crisis, the devastating cyclone Nargis in Myanmar on May 3, the 7.9 magnitude earthquake in the Sichuan province of China on May 12, another earthquake in Indonesia...

Before the ink on this article dries, I won't be surprised if another disaster looms at the horizon.

In this modern age of gadgets and gizmos, where the world seeks to mechanise and dehumanise, where everything is organised and sanitised, where the masses have been anaesthetised and desensitised, there appears to be very little biblical compassion.

But the Word of God in Matthew chapters 9, 14 and 15 records for us the heart of Jesus when He said, "I have compassion" because the people "had nothing to eat," were in a "deserted place," were sick, "harassed and helpless" besides having no one to care for and guide them.

Adam Clark describes compassion as being "moved with pity from the innermost bowels". And with the increase of the motion of the bowels, it supposedly "produces considerable pain at seeing the miseries of others".

There is no better time to evaluate the heart of the Church than today. The Church, unfortunately, has fallen short of Jesus' standard.

We have been "too slow" to respond. By the time Mercy Malaysia or the Red Crescent flights take off from KLIA, the Church is still collecting money. Every church should look into building up reserves for community work, so that we can respond immediately and meaningfully.

We are "too bogged down" with boardroom discussions on strategies, whilst hundreds of thousands are suffering.

Others are too engrossed with "sending people away" (Matt. 14:15) instead of caring for them – if somehow we could herd illegal refugees conveniently into some refugee camps or send them off to some other countries (especially those who preach human rights) – to preserve our lifestyle.

In our zeal to be a developed nation, we are getting "too divorced from reality". The Economist¹ reported that there are an estimated 1 billion people living on just US\$1 today. This fact will no doubt *not* cause billions to bat an eye. Then there are those who have become "too egoistic."

We need to ask ourselves if our vision is self-serving and tainted. Jesus was tired; so were the disciples.

Jesus' solution was simply "let's do something for them NOW!" No discussion was needed. No statements were needed. No papers presented. Even no "Nation Building plan" was considered.

Jesus moved immediately, speedily – He took the common sense approach, because He had compassion.

I want that kind of compassion. In the midst of so many crises, there is this rare opportunity for us to showcase the love and compassion of our Lord. It's time we talk less and do more.

It is time we die to our individual agendas and bring together our resources for the common good of God's agenda.

I want to be part of the compassionate Church.

¹ April 19–25, 2008 issue.

Changing guards at NECF

Transition in motion. Search for new Secretary-General begins.



Man at the helm – Sam Ang

The recent 11th biennial general meeting of the NECF Malaysia saw several personnel changes that set the ball rolling for transition within the organisation.

Rev. Wong Kim Kong has been re-designated Executive Advisor with immediate effect after serving 11 years as secretary-general, while former NECF Honorary Secretary Sam Ang takes over as Acting Secretary-General. Assuming Sam's former seat is Pr Tay Wah Seng of *The Vineyard Church*.

The other three executive committee (exco) members remain, with Rev. Eu Hong Seng as Chairman, Elder Kong Yeng Phooi as Vice-Chairman and Elder Dr Khoo Kay Hup as Honorary Treasurer.

Meanwhile, the floor elected several people into the council to serve the two-year term (see list on right).

In his Chairman's address, Rev. Eu

announced that the Council has started the search to fill the secretary-general post. During the transition period, Rev. Wong takes on an advisory role as advisor to the NECF ministries and staff. In addition, he is responsible for maintaining active liaison with the Christian fraternity, other religious bodies and the Government. He continues to advise churches and organisations, and assists in mediation and resolution in church conflict.

Sam will oversee the day-to-day running of NECF besides heading the NECF Foundation and the newly-established Samaritan Bhd, a micro-credit company that provides monetary assistance to the poor to own small viable businesses that will help them to be self-sufficient.

Explaining the rationale for Samaritan Bhd, a ministry in keeping with NECF's nation-building agenda, Rev. Eu said, "There is the spiritual and social aspect of nation building. Evangelism, church planting, discipling believers are all essential components of spiritual nation building.

"On the social front, it entails more than engagement with government – we need to provide the social infrastructure to touch our communities. This includes involvement in the medical, educational and agricultural sectors among others."

He urged churches to rise up like "Josephs", to begin to build up

NECF COUNCIL MEMBERS

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and Grace Hee (*rep. Women's Commission*).

reserves in their storehouses so that they could release the grains in times of need and thus, be a blessing to the nation.

Rev. Eu also said the council would immediately begin the process of passing the baton by identifying younger members to take over.

Earlier on, the meeting observed a one-minute silence in honour of the late David Boler, NECF founding chairman (see pg 5).

NECF also invited several evangelism-based organisations to present the various methods of evangelism, and set up information booths. The Alpha team spoke on youth evangelism, Harvest Centre touched on community evangelism while Raphah Ministries highlighted power evangelism (signs and wonders).

MATTHEW AND FRIENDS Programme Re-run

Following the encouraging response and in view of the great evangelistic potential of last year's Matthew and Friends programme (MAF), NECF Malaysia has decided to re-run the programme this year.

Dec. 19 to 21 has been set aside for the programme to run nationwide. NECF has written to churches to get their participation and will also mobilise nationwide prayers.

MAF was initiated and mobilised by Celebration of Hope Malaysia, which was fully funded by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and endorsed by most churches and denominational leaders throughout Malaysia.

It was held during the Christmas season last year where thousands of Christians invited their friends to their homes for a meal followed by a gospel film show.

The project recorded nearly 10,000 indication for salvation and over 7,000 for rededication.

Foundation for the Future

Over the past four years, NECF Foundation has been quietly helping many pastors and full-time workers by providing material assistance. Though the ministry may be low-key, yet the assistance it renders has long-term impact for the future generations of the beneficiaries.

For example, the interest-free loan extended to pastors' children for their tertiary education has lent them hope of a brighter future. Thus far, the foundation has disbursed RM135,094 to help fund the education of 14 full-time workers' children. Another RM51,500 has been given out as welfare support (medical expenses and cash aid).

Another form of help that has far-reaching impact is the subsidies given to needy pastors in East Malaysia for their insurance premiums.

Through a special insurance scheme specially packaged by Great Eastern (GE) for NECF, many full-time workers whose churches could not afford to buy insurance for them, can now serve easier with insurance coverage.

Because of the large number of participants, GE is able to underwrite the scheme at a lower premium, thus making it affordable to many full-time workers.

In addition, GE contributes two percent of all premiums it collects to the NECF Foundation, which in turn subsidises half of the premiums for 376 East Malaysian full-time workers. The subsidy given thus far is RM103,955.

Recently, a Sarawakian pastor died in a car accident but because he had earlier purchased this insurance policy, his wife and young children had a substantial amount of money to ease their burden.

This is not the case for another pastor who died alongside his two young sons in a pre-dawn fire that swept his house in Beluran, near Sandakan in Sabah. In the March 30 incident, Prince Lee died on the spot while his father, Richard Lee, went home to the Lord eight days later. The eldest son followed suit on April 19.

Another son suffered serious burns to the face and body and the mother, Shirly Gakim, was so busy tending to



Recovering from the physical and emotional pain – Shirly Gakim and her two surviving children.

him at the hospital that she missed her husband's and children's funeral.

Only the youngest child was spared the fury of the fire, but the family, which had been serving at SIB Iran Baru, lost all their belongings. The family did not own any insurance policy and they are now under the care of SIB Sabah. Shirly has written to NECF for welfare support from the foundation, and the committee is looking into her request.

There are many crying needs, but the foundation's fund is limited and fast depleting. In the last two years, it received RM170,498 donation, which the foundation expects will be used up within two years.

The NECF Foundation was set up to ease the burden of those in full-time ministry. If you would like to be part of this work of caring for God's servants, please send your cheque, addressed to "NECF Foundation".

...Continued from front cover

peace they craved for. Even after Samuel warned them about the grave prospects of family break-ups and the oppression that the king would inflict, they persisted with their demand.

They placed all their hope on one man – a king.

Fast forward to the New Testament just before Jesus' birth. The Israelites were labouring under the tyrannical Roman rule and wearily looking for a saviour, a Messiah to deliver them from King Herod.

Luke 2: 25–32 recorded the story of Simeon, a just and devout man who was waiting for the "Consolation of Israel". While the people around him were anticipating a human king to deliver them from the pit of despair,

Simeon – who had the Holy Spirit (vs 25) – knew better.

What was truly needed was deliverance from spiritual darkness. The intense social oppression, economic depression and moral decay that plagued the Israelites were a result of sin, which lies at the root of all evils.

Recognising this, Simeon uttered as he took baby Jesus into his arms, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation...A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel" (vs 30, 32). Simeon saw with spiritual eyes that Jesus was the author of comfort, the One who could bring true salvation and hope to all mankind.

We echo the words of Simeon that Jesus is the "consolation of Malaysia".



This is not to say that we just preach Jesus and do nothing else, for word and work must go together (see Chairman's message on pg 2). But let us not be beguiled into putting our hope on man to eradicate all our problems. The message of the gospel is that salvation and deliverance ultimately lie in Jesus.

As followers of the Saviour, our chief goal is to point people to the Redeemer. Whether we are workers in the marketplace, politicians in the parliament, homemakers in the community, students in institutions or servants in NGOs, our supreme duty is to heed the call of our Lord to "go and make disciples of all nations".

Farewell, Mr Boler

In 1998, NECF Malaysia published a book entitled “The Pursuit of God’s Cause – In Honour of David Boler”. In the preface, it was recorded: “The suggestion of coming out with a book to honour David Boler for his manifold influence and contributions to the Christian Church and society in Malaysia and beyond, was met with immediate enthusiasm by his evangelical friends.”

Mr Boler’s “evangelical friends” were leaders from across the evangelical spectrum: Brethren, Anglican, Evangelical Free Church, Methodist, Sidang Injil Borneo and Independent Charismatic churches.

They contributed essays that recounted the life and impact of the evangelical Church in Malaysia, and thought it fitting to attribute the book to the one man whom they considered one of the most influential leaders in the evangelical Church in Malaysia.

That the honour was accorded while Mr Boler was well and alive spoke volumes of the deep respect and high esteem the Christian community held for him. Ten years have passed since then; through this

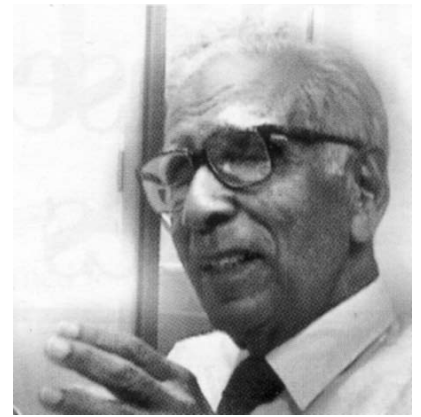
decade, that respect had deepened and esteem heightened.

On April 27, Mr Boler crossed the finishing line in this earthly race which he began 89 years ago. Many went to pay their last respect and once again, they were representatives from across the evangelical spectrum.

There were tears, of course, but there was also a sense of celebration for a life well-lived, a life that, yielded to the Master’s bidding, was a clear mirror of His humility and grace in everything he did.

And he accomplished much in this life, being instrumental to the establishment of several crucial ministries that have served and are still actively serving the Christian community. Some of these ministries were born during his retirement years after he left Bukit Bintang Boys’ School where he was headmaster for 13 years.

During his pre-retirement years, he served in various capacities as Chairman of Scripture Union, founding Chairman of the Bible Society of Malaysia and a leader of the Malaysian Christian Schools Council,



besides being an elder of his church, Jalan Gasing Gospel Hall.

He was the founding Chairman of NECF Malaysia and played a key role in forming the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) – the national Christian representative body – and convincing CFM of the need to engage with the other religious groups. Soon after, the Malaysian Consultative of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) was formed, with CFM as the member representing Christians. (The group has been renamed MCCBCHST to include the Taiosts.)

We will deeply miss Mr Boler. May His peace and comfort rest upon his wife, Yvonne, their children Brenda and Douglas, and all their loved ones.

(Please see insert for for eulogies.)

MyKad Woes Over “Bin”

Edwin* was finally marrying his childhood sweetheart. It’s going to be one grand wedding as the entire church, who had watched the young lovers grew up, was involved in the celebration. Then, the pastor of their Sabah church found out that Edwin and Stella* could not register their marriage with the Registrar of Marriage because Edwin’s MyKad stated he was a Muslim. To legalise his marriage, Edwin had to be married under Syariah law.

Earlier on, Edwin had tried to remove the word “Islam” from his Mykad at the Registration Department but was told by the officer that he had

to go through the normal procedure – get an exit order from the Syariah court or show proof that he was not a Muslim. Because it was such a cumbersome process, Edwin did not pursue the matter.

After much discussion, Edwin and Stella decided against the Muslim marriage. Since they couldn’t be married under civil law, they decided to just have the church ceremony. And so they did. They had a beautiful wedding, despite the knowledge that their marriage was not recognised by the Government and that that Edwin might be charged by the Syariah court with “khalwat” for living with a non-

Muslim.

Two years later, junior came along, but their joy was cut short when they tried to register the baby’s birth at the Registration Department. The couple was faced with the reality that the baby must be registered as a Muslim in accordance with Edwin’s MyKad religion.

They still have a way out – they could register the baby under the mother’s name under the single-mother status (since they don’t have



Continued on page 6...

BAHASA BENEDICTION

Pronounce the benediction at the end of your weekly worship service in Bahasa Malaysia with the word “Allah” to impress upon all congregations to continue to use the word without fear or favour – that is the call of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) on churches throughout the country

The call was as a show of support for SIB Sabah which has filed a court case on the use of the word “Allah” and several other issues the East Malaysian churches have been facing in practising their faith as a result of governmental and administrative actions.

CFM has also revised and re-issued the Kuching Declaration, first issued at The Kuching Consultation in 1989, in support of the right to use Bahasa Malaysia in the life and witness of churches and Christian organisations.

The declaration note the increasing difficulties of East Malaysian Christians in dealing with the relevant authorities in the publication, distribution and importation of the Alkitab and other Christian literature particularly in Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia.

CFM declared that:

- The restriction sought to be imposed is contrary to the Federal Constitution and objectionable in law as

are the various administrative actions and measures taken to deny access to Christian literature in Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia;

- We have a right and are entitled to use the national language – Bahasa Malaysia – in its entirety as with any other language without any distinction on the grounds of differing faith; and
- All efforts will be taken to inform the relevant authorities and the people who have influence on public policy of our stand and to seek ways to have the restrictions revoked and to pursue a fairer and just implementation of administrative measures in the case of religious materials.

WE AFFIRM our stand to continue our use of Bahasa Malaysia in its entirety;

RESTATE our solidarity as Christians in facing together whatever may arise on account of our stand and conviction; and

URGE all Churches to be vigilant and unceasing in prayers for wisdom on the part of all concerned to amicably resolve this serious issue and for the maintenance of a united, harmonious and peaceful nation where justice, human rights and human dignity are upheld at all times.

...Continued from page 5

a marriage certificate). However, they run the risk that someone may inform the Muslim authorities that the baby's father (Edwin) was a Muslim.

Edwin is just one of the many East Malaysians facing this problem. But in the first place, why was he listed as a Muslim in his MyKad?

It started with his late father whose name carried a “Bin”. When registering for his MyKad, the officer, assuming he was a Malay, automatically listed him as a Muslim and entered “Islam” into his data. The word “Islam” is engraved on his MyKad, according to the law. Thus, he became a Muslim though he had been a third-generation Christian.

In East Malaysia, it is common for bumiputeras to have “bin” (for males) and “binti” (for females) in their names, but this does not mean they are Malays.

Edwin's father had taken little

notice of the word “Islam” in his MyKad as he thought that as long as he was going to church and practising the Christian way of life, there would be no problem. When he took his children to the Registration Department to get their MyKad, the officers naturally registered them as Muslims, again according to the law.

Many East Malaysian Christians who have the entry “Islam” in their MyKad have tried getting the Registration Department to remove it but to no avail.

Often, when they tell the Registration Department officers that they have been Christians for many generations, they are told to bring their fathers or mothers to the department for verification. Unfortunately, most of the time, the parents have passed on and there is none left to verify their claim. If the parents are still alive but their MyKad carry the word “Islam”, it's back to square one.

Edwin inherited the problem

from his father and now, his baby has inherited the problem. And the unwanted inheritance will pass on if they are unable to solve the problem.

To help resolve this issue, NECF Malaysia is now conducting a nationwide exercise to gather information on the number of East Malaysian Christians who are facing this problem. NECF has notified the Bahasa churches in Peninsular and East Malaysia to provide information of their members whose MyKad carry the entry “Islam”.

The data in the MyKad can be easily retrieved from a MyKad reader, which can be purchased at the Registration Departments, or through the Astro decoder.

NECF will then collate the information and forward it to the Christian Federation Malaysia (CFM) who will then meet with the relevant authorities to discuss the issue.

*(*Names have been changed.)*

Pointless to Pray?

Paul warns of perilous times in the last days where “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). In this light, it seems pointless to pray against the evil (men) that is (are) growing each day, since Scripture also states that “lawlessness will increase” (Matt. 24:12). So is praying against the increase of crime and corruption consistent with God’s Word?

How then ought we to pray? According to the Lord’s Prayer?

DR LEONG TIEN FOCK clears the fog.

Most evangelical Christians assume that the two verses refer to the end-times. Even if we accept this assumption, praying against the increase of crime and corruption is not inconsistent with these verses, for 2 Tim. 3:13 is not about the increase of corruption and Matt. 24:12 is not about the increase of crime. This is because the “evil men” are the “impostors”, false teachers who are “deceiving and being deceived”. They have departed from Scripture.

In response, Paul admonished Timothy to remain in the things he had learned from Scripture (3:14–15). Having then affirmed Scripture as the inspired Word of God and hence, its usefulness in teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (3:16–17), he charged Timothy to preach it, whether it was “in season” to do so or not (4:1–2).

For in light of the impostors becoming worse, a time will come when many will no longer endure sound teaching (4:3–5).

As R. T. France says in his recent commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, “lawlessness in Matthew refers not only to criminal activity, but to a lifestyle which is outside the law of God; even the morally scrupulous scribes and Pharisees have been accused of lawlessness (23:28)”.

The “lawlessness” in Matt. 24:12 is evidently similar to that of the scribes and the Pharisees, as it is applied to those whose love (for God and other people) have grown cold (Matt. 24:13). Thus they “are lovers of pleasure rather than God, having the appearance of

godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:4–5).

Even if Scripture clearly teaches that in the endtimes crime and corruption will become increasingly and irreversibly intensive and extensive, we still cannot assume that we are already in those times. The outcome of the recent general elections shows that at least in Malaysia the increase of corruption and crime is reversible.

In fact many Christians believe that their prayers affected this outcome. Hence prayer against the increase of crime and corruption is not inconsistent with Scripture; in the current Malaysian context, it is also very meaningful.

How then shall we pray?

Yes, the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9–14) is the best place to learn how to pray, even to pray against social evils like crime and corruption. The first thing to note is that, before teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus told them how not to pray (Matt. 6:5–8).

They are not to pray like the unbelievers who suppose that they would be heard for their many words. For God the Father already knows our needs even before we ask. He does not need to be informed through our prayers. So in answering a prayer He is not responding to the information presented to Him. What then is He responding to?

Obviously He is responding to our faith in Him, expressed through the prayer. So we need to be careful that our faith is not in fact in the prayer itself but in the God who answers prayer. And needless to add, He is also

responding to the whole-heartedness and sincerity with which we pray. So we cannot truly pray for something that we do not really care about. All this is assumed in the Lord’s Prayer.

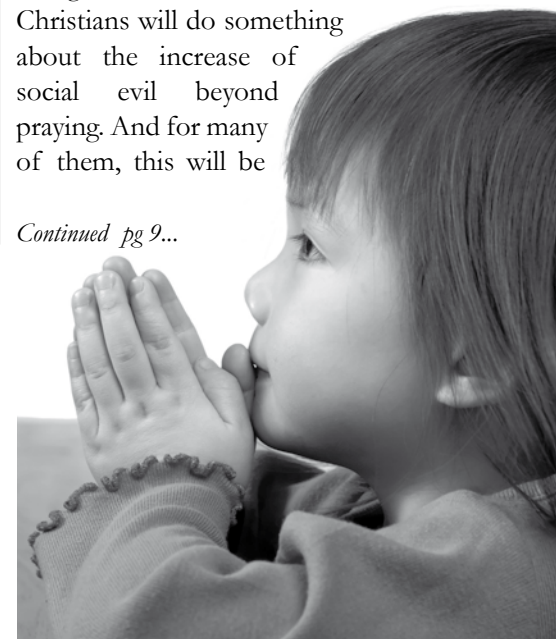
For the Lord’s Prayer is not so much about what to pray but how to pray. If we are to pray whole-heartedly and sincerely, “Your kingdom come”, that is, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10), we must really care about God’s will even when we are not praying.

This means we have a heart that has no other agenda except to see God’s will done. Certainly this includes praying according to God’s will. But to pray for God’s kingdom to come is to pray for His reign to be established, resulting in His will done, on earth as it is in heaven. To pray this whole-heartedly and sincerely presumes a desire for God’s will done not only in our own life and family but also in our nation and in the world.

Praying against social evil is only one expression of this desire, which will express itself beyond praying. Hence having prayed, “Your kingdom come,” we are to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

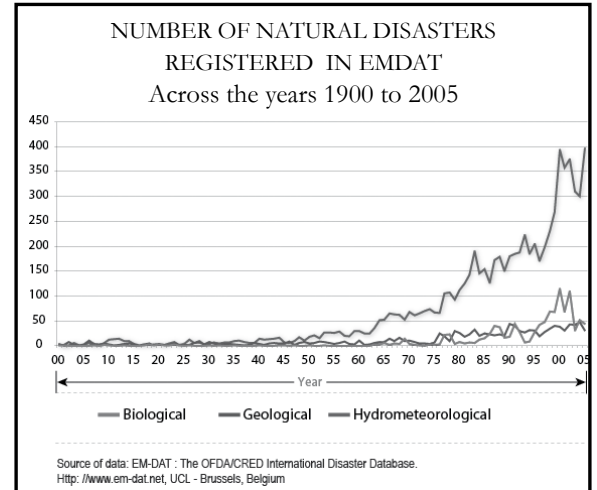
So, when more and more Christians truly pray against social evil, it means less and less Christians will be involved in any form of corruption or wrongdoing. It also means more and more Christians will do something about the increase of social evil beyond praying. And for many of them, this will be

Continued pg 9...



Are we ready for MORE DISASTERS ?

‘It was the worst of times, it was the best of times’ – this modified quotation from Charles Dickens’s “A Tale of Two Cities” very aptly describes the scenario pertaining to disasters, as well as the response of the Malaysian Church, writes *DR NG SWEE MING*.



Disasters, be they natural or man-made, always result in suffering and deaths – from small localised floods affecting merely a few households to catastrophes like earthquakes and tsunamis involving an entire nation or groups of nations.

Disasters have happened throughout man’s history but now the frequency appears to be increasing at an alarming rate. Various causes have been proposed and the commonly-touted ones are global warming, environmental mismanagement and deforestation.

As Christians, we cannot help but see the correlation between what is happening in the world today and what God’s Word says will happen in the end-times.

Jesus taught His disciples regarding “the signs of the coming of the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3b), that there will be false teachers and teachings, wars and rumours of wars, “nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom” with “famines and earthquakes” (Matt. 24:4–7). He also said that these are but just “the beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8). These Scripture references from Matthew 24 and the parallel passage in Mark 13 are stark reminders of an uncomfortable impending reality.

How then can and should the Church respond at such a time as this? If we see the signs and understand the times like the men of Issachar from of old (1 Chr. 12:32), there must be a greater sense of urgency in our ministry for the Lord for we can only “work while it is still day, night will come when no one can work” (John 9:4).

The “Great Conclusion” will only come when ‘the

gospel of the kingdom’ has been “preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.” (Matt. 24:14)

Bearing this in mind, the Church needs to get herself ready for the coming disasters, not only for the sake of self-preservation but for the deluge of hunger and responsiveness that often accompany times of crisis and disaster. In times of disaster, when people’s usual support structure and beliefs are shaken to the core, there is an openness to the Good News. As someone rightly pointed out, “There are no atheists during an earthquake.”

God’s people can and should be there to extend tangible, practical help and love, be it just in giving a cup of drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, medical help to the injured, or even just a listening ear to the grieving.

A demonstration of the love of God, with no strings attached, in many situations will invite the grateful recipients to ask “Why...?” This gives us the golden opportunity to share the Good News – all because we have walked the talk. This was the experience during the recent disasters in Indonesia and Pakistan, as well as in our very own backyard – Johore and Malacca. Alas, because Christians and congregations were not ready or prepared, the resulting response was patchy and not so well coordinated.

Disaster is happening all around us and Malaysia is extremely blessed to be spared from much of the devastation that has affected neighbouring countries. Even the flooding that has occurred in our nation can in no way be compared to what happens in countries like Bangladesh year after year.

Christian volunteers serving food to victims of the 2004 Johore flood.



Continued pg 10...

Enough for All

IN her paper, *Transform Nation Agenda – Economic Sufficiency and Justice*, HO SUI-JADE explores the issue of economic sufficiency and justice within the cultural dynamics specificities of Malaysia. She highlights the damaging effects of poverty on society, what Scriptures say about the Church's role and responsibility in ensuring economic sufficiency for all, and proposes strategies that the Church could adopt towards bringing about economic sufficiency. This is an extract of her paper. The full article will be available in the upcoming NECF Forum VI book released by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.



Economic life in all its ramifications is of profound ethical significance. This is so because of scarcity which gives rise to conflict, because of interdependence which creates mutual obligations, because of the wide range of values sought through economic activity, and because of the significance for human life of the economic process itself.

– Howard Bowen¹ –

As heirs of the biblical prophet Micah who summons us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8) and disciples of our Jesus Christ who told us “for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...I needed clothes and you clothed me...

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:35–40), we realise that the concern for the poor is at the very heart of God.

It is said that one of the greatest scandals in the world today is the growing gap between the rich and poor, both at the international level and within individual countries.

Indeed, historically, this trend has been prevalent since time immemorial. Members of society have commonly

been divided according to their wealth status as the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’.

In Scripture, economic concerns and acts of justice are woven intricately together. At the heart of this witness is the call to Jubilee, a call first, to acknowledgement that the world created by God is abundant with enough for everyone, as long as mankind restrains his appetite and lives within limits. Situations of extreme economic insufficiency in pockets of society are not natural but the product of sin with man turning against the biblical mandate of caring for the poor. Hence, the second call to Jubilee is a call to redemption – to rectify serious deprivations in the socio-economic order and to set forth the mandate for spiritual renewal and faithfulness to the Lord.

On all account, the question on economic sufficiency and justice is

increasingly pertinent in our local context, not least driven by the need to listen to the cry of the oppressed, to be present in the pulse of the world by bearing and living the Good News; but increasingly also due to the shifting in the local political and economic tectonic plates amidst greater uncertainties in the global economic and financial front.

Through discerning the ‘signs of the times’, the key in addressing questions on economic sufficiency lies in the threat to our global environment and its inner connection to the consumerist ethos of our economic system.

Globally, economics has departed from the root meaning of the term *oikonomia*²: the management of the household in a manner concerned for the long-term relationship of the household with the environment itself. The desired outcome of a healthy economy is one underpinned by good stewardship.

Unfortunately, by advocating an

Continued pg 11...

...Continued from pg 7

more than just through the ballot box.

If this is how the Church is to pray against the increase of social evil, it will not do to just challenge as many Christians as possible to pray as though we are heard for our many words, thus putting our faith in the prayers rather than in

God. There is the need to sensitise Christians so that they whole-heartedly and sincerely care about God's will done not only in and through their lives but also in the nation.

Tien Fock's Ph.D is in *Near Eastern Languages and Cultures* (University of California). He is Research Coordinator at Malaysia Campus Crusade of Christ and a freelance lecturer at several seminaries.

Free to Choose

The Prime Minister recently announced that a regulation on conversion to Islam would soon be introduced in response to the highly-controversial and -publicised cases – such as “body snatching” and inheritance issues – arising from the death of family members.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi proposed that would-be converts first inform their families before converting to Islam.

The announcement, lauded by some, has drawn different responses from various quarters. Both MCCBCHST and CCM want the would-be converts to provide documented proof that their families have been informed at the point of conversion.

On the other hand, senior Islamic

leaders unanimously rejected the proposal at the end of a conference that was held to streamline Syariah and civil laws.

The conference – attended by state legal advisors, muftis, syariah judges and Islamic department directors – said that the decision to inform their family members be left to the would-be convert.

Earlier on, the Bar Council had pointed out that the at-death disputes were only one of the many issues faced by non-converting spouses.

In many cases, the deceased did not appear to their families to be practising Muslims when they were alive despite claims from the religious



Disputes involving a non-Muslim party must be settled in a civil court.

authorities. Some had long renounced Islam even though they did not have an “exit order” as proof. Others were mistakenly identified as Muslims because of the confusion in names or technical glitches at the Registration Department. Hence, the issue cannot be resolved by just a pre-conversion notification.

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Is it not timely for the Church in Malaysia to rise up and play a more proactive and significant role in this whole area of disaster response, bearing in mind its importance in God's end-time plans?

Ad-hoc, uncoordinated disaster response by well-intentioned churches, individuals or small groups of Christians is good and commendable. However, it is inadequate, possibly ineffective in the bigger scheme of things and definitely unsustainable.

In contrast, a unified, well-prepared and structured response drawing on the combined resources of the entire Body of Christ, both in terms of availability of man-power and professional skills as well as finances, will be much more effective and sustainable in any given disaster.

The Malaysian Church at present is far from this ideal situation. We can and must do much better if similar disasters recur, but “good disaster response” is not something that will just happen by itself – much time, effort and finance must be invested in identifying, mobilising, training and equipping Christians within the confines of a local church or better still inter-church / denominational context.

I am proposing that the Malaysian Church and her leaders seriously consider putting in place people and resources for quick and concerted disaster response. We all need to catch the vision and this must be followed by setting aside the necessary personnel with proper training

and equipment. ‘Disaster Response’ as such, should be viewed as part of the missions outreach in any church requiring the support and encouragement of church leadership.

In conclusion, times of disasters may be the “worst of times” but the response shown by God's people can turn it into the “best of times”. What the devil intended for destruction and evil, God through His people can turn it into something good (see Gen.50:20).

Dr Ng Swee Ming is married to Dr Ng Kok Moi, a dental surgeon by training who has been serving full-time in their church, SSMC, Petaling Jaya. Besides his medical practice, he actively serves with CREST, a Christian-based disaster-relief organisation.

Editor's Note: If you or your church are interested in exploring this idea further, please contact Dr Ng. He is in the process of putting together the necessary syllabus for the various training modules (utilising the Basic Module, input from the Malaysian Civil Defence Department where possible) and will be conducting the training in partnership with CREST and other Christians who have the necessary experience and expertise.

If you feel you are able and willing to contribute and would like to be a trainer for any of the above modules, please also contact him for further details. He can be contacted at 017-3330088 or ngsweeming@gmail.com

For comparison, similar two-day basic first aid courses are available commercially at about RM500 to RM850 per person.

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Other problems that have arisen from the conversion issue include property disputes and the unilateral conversion of the children's religion by the converted party.

An example is the Subashini case where the Federal Court allowed the unilateral conversion of her children by her converted Muslim husband. The decision disregarded Subashini's rights as a mother and the fact that the minors were born from a civil marriage.

Notwithstanding the fact that Islam, unlike other faiths, is a legislated religion, there is the question of

infringing the religious freedom provision in Article 11 of the Federal Constitution. Profession of faith is primarily a personal choice and involves freedom of conscience.

NECF Malaysia therefore continues to call for every person to be allowed the freedom to choose his/her religion. NECF also asks for easy access for those who desire to return to their original faith.

Having said that, NECF commends the Government for making the effort to resolve the long-drawn conversion problem.

Meanwhile, we wish to reiterate:

1. All matters pertaining to a marriage that is solemnised under

the civil law (e.g. inheritance, custody, religious status of minor, etc.) are in the jurisdiction of the civil courts and subject only to civil law. The religious status of a minor must be determined by both parents;

2. The civil courts must be the final arbiter as long as one party involved in a legal entanglement is a non-Muslim person; and
3. A person who reaches the age of majority has the absolute right to choose the religion of his choice. Any law on conversion must allow the person complete freedom to choose his/her faith or no faith at all.

...continued from page 9

unending pursuit of higher levels of economic growth, classical economics has functioned as if natural resources were unlimited and it would be acceptable to adopt a 'benign neglect' approach on the impact of human work on the environment and other people.

In this reckless pursuit for wealth, the "good news for the poor" has been widely translated to mean "bad news for the rich". This underscores the zero-sum logic, a pervasive claim that goes against the very grain of the proclamation of Jubilee and runs far and deep into the structure and psyche of society. In a sense, there is a role for collective responsibility as we consider this as the most pervasive spiritual problem of our time.

Economic insufficiency is propagated, in part, by this sense of resource scarcity and thus, the need to grab as much as one can, as fast as one can, condemning thousands of millions of our sisters and brothers to extreme poverty and hundreds of millions to wealth. Both extremes are deprived of their fundamental humanity, although in different ways.

As Malaysia celebrated its Jubilee year in 2007, this issue is timely to encourage and mobilise Malaysian Christians to continue to pursue nation-building agenda that would further His Kingdom's work in bringing "good news to the poor". This would involve both the

"At the heart of this witness is the call to Jubilee, a call first, to acknowledgement that the world created by God is abundant with enough for everyone, as long as mankind restrains his appetite and lives within limits."

proclamation of the good news and greater involvement in active works of redemption.

Despite the economic accolades that our nation has achieved since independence, there are still 325,000 poor households in Malaysia; hence we must ask: Why are there still about one million poor people in Malaysia?³ What would it mean for Malaysian Christians to take a more deliberate and concerted step to act on behalf of our sisters and brothers who suffer under economic deprivation? More urgently, what is the cost of not acting?

An agenda for nation transformation, needless to say, cannot be an annual project alone. It is not even a five-year project. The economic

woe that has cut through the artery of every political, economic and even religious paradigm would likely persist throughout and beyond our lifetime.

Nonetheless, as economists, politicians, philosophers, ethicists and theologians continue to contemplate on the intricacies of the causes and effects of poverty, we as disciples of Christ, could do well to meditate on Jesus' answer to John's question, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (Matt. 11:5 – emphasis added.)

Ho Sui-Jade is the Manager, Financial Market Surveillance Section Monetary Assessment and Strategy Department at Bank Negara Malaysia. She holds an MA Economics from the UK University of Cambridge.

¹ Quoted in Stapleford, J.E., *Bulls, Bears and Golden Calves – Applying Christian Ethics in Economics*, InterVarsity Press, 2002

² Oikonomia: to be a manager of a household or a property, either one's own or another's (Luke 16:2); a spiritual trust, administration or commission (1 Cor 9:17, Eph 3:2, Col 1:25)

³ Assuming an average household of four.

Land, land, everywhere, but not a piece to build

For non-Muslim religious bodies, getting government approval for a piece of land to site a building for worship purposes is a most daunting challenge. While the Government makes provision for land to build worship places, the process to acquire the land and subsequently erect the building is so cumbersome, obstacle-ridden and protracted that many applicants just give up.

For the tenacious few who won't quit, the process could take up to 10 years. That is, if their application sees the light of day. Many have therefore resorted to housing their worship places in various types of buildings.

But first, let's look at the law. According to the Town and Country Planning Standard Manual, Peninsular Malaysia 1998, the density ratio is 1:2,600 non-Muslim residents or 1:5,000 residents. The area for every 2,600 non-Muslims must not exceed 0.5 hectare and the building can only cover 40% to 60% of the lot and must comply with the Uniform Building by-law 1984.

Additionally, "as far as is possible, the non-Islamic place of worship should not be located in an area where the majority of the population is of the Islamic faith. Special consideration could be given in an area where the majority of followers are from a particular non-Islamic religion by the authority under specific circumstances." [Town and Country Planning Department (JPBD) 4/2000]

In theory, applying for land for religious purpose is straightforward, as follows:

- 1) Firstly, identify if there is land available (for religious purposes) through the district officer or survey officer. Generally, land is classified under the industrial, commercial, institutional, agriculture or residential category.
- 2) If the land (that has been identified) is not gazetted under any of the above, then you need to apply for the piece to be gazetted under institutional land for religious purposes.
- 3) Once it is gazetted, you can start your application to erect the building. Again, this process can take some time.

For new housing estates, you need to:

- 1) Approach the housing developer to identify the land.
- 2) Solicit the help of the developer to apply to the Town Council to designate the land for religious purpose.

For existing residential areas, you may also identify private land and apply to convert it for religious use. The application is to be made to the state executive council and processed by the land office.

It may sound simple but in practice, the application for land for religious use goes through many committees, including the district security committee, the state security

committee, various government departments, the police, and even the Islamic Religious Affairs Department, and finally the state executive council.

Along the tortuous route, there is the danger that the application file can go "missing". Even after surviving the arduous journey and the land has been converted for religious use, there is still the building stage that is also fraught with many hurdles. The church now has to submit an application to the local authority for approval of the building plans. However, because it involves a non-Muslim place of worship, the process of going through the district and state security committees has to be repeated.

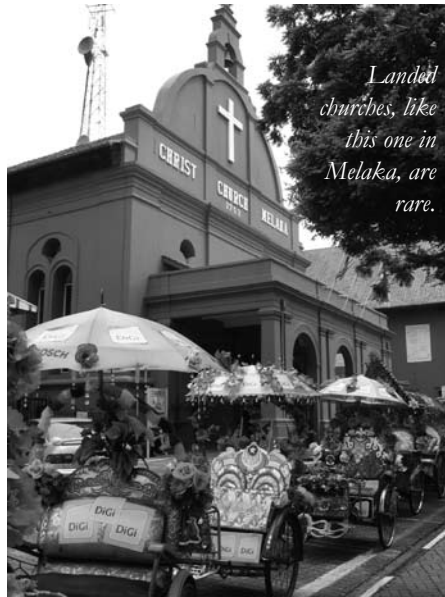
The process to acquire land is indeed difficult and not for the fainthearted. However, it is not impossible. Recently, the Holy Light Church in Johor Baru received approval from the Johor government to convert its land from agricultural to religious use. The process took 16 years!

The church had bought the agricultural land in 1989 and when they applied for the conversion of the land use, they found out that the state government had other plans for it. In 1995, the church filed a suit against the government which subsequently withdrew from the land acquisition.

In 1999, the church applied again for the use of the land, which was sub-divided into two lots, to be converted for institutional and religious purposes. In 2000, the state government only approved one piece for institutional use.

The church's tenacity in pursuing its application bore fruit in April when, at its meeting, the state executive council finally approved the application. The matter had earlier been highlighted to the Chief Minister by Roger Tan, a Bar Council member and also a member of the church.

This is an opportune time to apply for land and churches are advised to engage the state assemblymen and even their chief ministers to explore this matter. In areas where there are several small churches, perhaps they can come together to apply for land. This is also a great way to demonstrate unity to the community.



Landed churches, like this one in Melaka, are rare.

Coming Up

Prayer Season

From now until end-August, NECF Malaysia will be running a series of prayer events for all three main languages involving children and adults. The prayer season kicked off with the just-concluded nationwide Global Day of Prayer on May 11 and the Children in Prayer conference in Penang from May 29 to 31.

National Tamil Prayer Rally June 21 at Subang Jaya

The NECF Tamil Commission has invited Rev. Mohan C. Lazarus of the Jesus Redeems Ministry in India to address the rally at Wisma Eagles. Admission is free. For more information, please contact Rev. Simon Chandran at 012-512 1976.

Chinese National Prayer Camp July 6–9 at Genting Highlands

Renewed and passionate individual Christians, coupled with a strong bond among churches will ultimately lead to national transformation – this is the message the Chinese Commission of NECF Malaysia wants to hit home to participants at their annual prayer camp this year.

And to bring this message home is Dr Eddie Ma, senior pastor of Hong Kong Shaukiwan Baptist Church, and NECF Secretary-General Rev. Wong Kim Kong. The camp is a prelude to the nationwide 40-day Merdeka Fast and Pray which will begin on July 22.

The registration fee of RM290 (triple-sharing room) and RM310 (twin-sharing room) includes board, meals and materials. For more information, contact Wing at the NECF office.

Children's Prayer Conference (English) Aug 18–19 at Petaling Jaya

Pr Sam Phun from Singapore returns as a speaker together with Pr Andy Loh (SIB KL) to help children aged 4 to 13 build their prayer lives. Co-speakers are Pr Vinvin Tan (Glad Tidings, Klang) and Joy Yeo (Sidewalk Ministry, Melaka). Themed *Power Up, Spread the Good News!*, the conference will focus on inspiring and empowering children to share the gospel. It will be held during the school holiday from Aug 18 to 19 at PJEFEC and conclude with a 'power concert' led by Pr Andy. Registration fee (meals and materials included) is RM35 (before July 31) and RM40 thereafter.

Bahasa National Prayer Conference Aug 21–23 at Kuala Lumpur

The prayer conference this year aims to convict the Bahasa churches on the need for more passionate intercession for the nation, and in particular, for the unreached people groups in each state.

The conference speaker is Bapak Daniel Panji who is the National Coordinator for the prayer network in Indonesia. Conference fee of RM50 per person covers meals and materials.

For more information, please contact Alfred Tais at the NECF office (03-7727 8227) or e-mail bahasa@necf.org.my

National Prayer Conference (English) Aug 27–29 at SIB Kuala Lumpur



The speakers are Freeda Bowers (pix), author of devotional guide "Give me 40 days", and SIB Senior Pastor Dr Chew Weng Chee.

Freeda is co-founder of WACX-TV, one of the most influential television stations in the Southeast United States. The station reaches out to over three million residents and the millions more

who visit the world-famous central Florida attractions.

Pr Chew is no stranger to the Christian community.

The conference will culminate in the National Prayer Rally at the same place on Aug 30.

NECF MALAYSIA WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Fresh Generation Community Church, Bandar Sunway, *rep. by Eddy Chang*; Epiphany Worship Centre, Ampang, *pastored by Malliga @ Monica Patrick*; JB Christian Assembly *pastored by Chan Tuck Him*; Hope Malaysia, Kuching, *rep. by Pr Simon Eng*; Hope of God, Labuan, *pastored by Kevin Su Mun Hing*; Christ the Living Stone Fellowship, Miri, *pastored by Nancy B. Wong*; Living Spring Fellowship, Johor Baru, *pastored by Khaw Sok Ling*; City Celebration Centre, Muar, *pastored by James Kuek Ser Leng*; Immanuel Missions Centre, Kuala Krai, Kelantan *pastored by Rev. Yesudason*; and CBMC Berhad, Kuala Lumpur, *rep. by Robert Cheah Booy*.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Pr Murugan a/l Kanniappan; Rev. Andrew Low Hong Seang; Cheah Eng Seng; Senator Dato' Lee Sing Chooi; and Lawrence Kam.

MALAYSIA (2007) STATISTICS DEPARTMENT

Population: 3,063,600 (est.)

Ethnic groups: Kadazan-Dusun 17.8%; Bajau 13.4%; Malay 11.52%, Murut 3.3% Other Bumiputera 14.6%; Chinese 9.6%; Indian 0.37%; Others 4.8%, Non-citizens 25% (Filipino, Indonesian)

Religious Breakdown (2001): Islam 63.7%; Christianity 27.8%; Buddhism 6.4%; No Religion 1.0%; Taoism/Confucianism 0.4%; Others 0.3%; Hinduism 0.1%; Unknown 0.3%

Incidence of poverty (2004): 23%
(Hardcore poor: 6.5%)



State Spot

Article 153 of the Federal Constitution provides for the natives of Sabah the special position and privileges as that of the Malays. Sabah joined Sarawak, independent Malaya and Singapore to form Malaysia in 1963. A 20-point agreement was made as part of the condition to join the Federation, and among the points are:

- There should be no state religion and the provisions relating to Islam in Federal Constitution should not apply.
- English should be an official language for all purposes without limitation of time.
- The natives should enjoy special rights analogous to those enjoyed by Malays.
- The power to amend the Constitution of Sabah belongs exclusively to the people of Sabah.

In the 1985 elections, the then opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), led by Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, form the state government. PBS ruled Sabah until 1994 when an internal agitation made way for UMNO to enter Sabah politics. Datuk Seri Musa Aman from UMNO was the Chief Minister from 2003 when the two-year rotation system was abolished.

In 2002, PBS' joining the Barisan Nasional coalition rendered Sabah a state with no competitive opposition. Regardless, there have been palpable tensions and occasional calls for withdrawal from the Federation.

An added impetus is the token 5% royalties for oil and gas. The Federal Government takes 95% of the profits, contributing very little to the state in return. Sabahans feel that the federal policies have generally been unfair and unfavorable to the state development. There have been calls for the review of these federal policies. Many believe that the NEP has not benefitted the Sabahan bumiputeras.

Despite the rich natural resources and the Prime Minister's assurance that "no community is left behind in the mainstream of development" (*The Star*, 7/11/07), Sabah falls greatly behind the mainstream in economic development.

Sabah, together with Sarawak, contributed to BN's simple majority in Parliament at the 2008 general elections in March. The recent political realities have prompted the various opposition parties to form a coalition called Pakatan Rakyat Sabah (*The Star*, 7/7/08).

Islamisation

Abuses

Before 1963, Sabah and Sarawak were guided by their native customs and British laws. The influence of Islam was minimal. In 1967, the new state government under Chief Minister Mustapha Datu Harun embarked on vigorous religious activities. Mustapha strongly believed that the Malay language and Islam should be used to unite the people.

The government-funded United Sabah Islamic Association was alleged to have been established to convert the people to Islam. There have been reported mass conversions, particularly in the rural areas, and persistent rumours that the state government applied pressure and resorted to bribery to "persuade" people to convert.

The most devastating blow came when Mustapha used his emergency powers to expel expatriate Christian missionaries with the reason that imperialist mentality and outlook should not be allowed to continue after independence, whether in relation to politics or religion (*Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra*, 1977, p. 266).

The Project IC or Project M, a political scandal relating to systematic granting of citizenship to immigrants, was reported to have begun when UMNO entered Sabah politics in the 1990s. The immigration policy favouring Muslims had resulted in an influx of immigrants from the Philippines and Indonesia, both legal and illegal. It is widely believed that this exercise was implemented to weaken the indigenous Kadazan-Dusun Christians and to enhance UMNO powerbase.

At a seminar in June 2007, the Chief Minister claimed that Malays formed more than 50% of the population, although the state's statistics showed only 11.5%.

Supporting the claim, his counterpart, the Chief Minister of Melaka, said, "Even if that person is Chinese or Indian or Kadazan, if they are Muslim or have converted, converse in Malay and follow the Malay tradition, then they are Malays" (*Daily Express*, 10/6/07).

Religious Freedom

In April 2007, a businesswoman complained to the then Minister of International Trade and Industry, Dato' Seri Rafidah Aziz, that her loan application was rejected because her unisex styling business was in conflict with Islam (*Daily Express*).

The Sabah Fatwa Council issued a decree banning all activities related to Rufaqa Corporation (*The Star*, 15/12/06). The Mufti said the movement had gone against Islamic teaching and caused confusion among the Muslim community. In May 2007, 11 people were arrested under the ISA for alleged involvement in an Islamist group known as Darul Islam Sabah.

There is no provision on conversion out of Islam. Muslims who wish to renounce Islam may face either punishment or mandatory detention at rehabilitation centres.

According to the 1995 Sabah Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment, "A Muslim who intends to or attempts to convert out of Islam is subject to be detained in the Islamic rehabilitation centre for a term not more than 36 months for 'rehabilitation' purpose." Further, a Muslim declaring himself to be a non-Muslim is guilty of ridiculing the religion and thus subjects himself to punishment.

Bahasa Malaysia is the medium of communication among the natives in the state and the Alkitab is the principal Scripture used by Christians. The term "Allah" in reference to God has been used for generations; it has become part of the cultural heritage. Despite this fact, churches, from time to time, face harassment from the local authorities for using Christian literature containing the word "Allah".

Last Aug 15, three boxes of Christian educational publications containing the word "Allah" and belonging to SIB Sabah were detained at the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) in Sepang by the Customs. The Internal Security Ministry subsequently took over the matter. After several unsuccessful appeals, the SIB church turned to legal redress at the civil court. The lawsuit against the Federal Government is ongoing.

Last year, a lawsuit was filed against the Sabah Chief Minister concerning a stop-work order on the Mazu (Goddess of the Sea) statue in Kudat. The project was said to have been approved in Dec 2005 but a stop-work order came after the state mufti in July 2006 issued a fatwa saying that the construction was contrary to Islamic teaching.

Administrative error on Sabahans' MyKad in relation to religious status has caused hardship to the people in recent years. The state registration department has presumptuously entered Islam to the MyKad of non-Muslim applicants simply because their names had the word "bin" or "binti". It has refused to make correction when mistakes were highlighted. Applicants have been asked to fly to Putrajaya in Kuala Lumpur for any amendment to their MyKad.

The entry of "Islam" on the MyKad has grave effects

on, among others, the non-Muslims' marriage, children's registration, burial and inheritance.

Others

Sabah's migrant population has been estimated to be anywhere from 600,000 to 1.7 million (Nov 2007). Political expediency and the state's historical ties have created longstanding illegal immigrant problem.

Without proper documentation and no access to educational opportunity, the stateless children of the migrants are facing bleak futures. Many of them were born locally and become street children once their parents are deported.

Statistics show that Sabah has the highest number of poor households in the country, especially in the interiors. Groups say that Sabahan non-Malay bumiputeras are marginalised and have not benefitted from the NEP. The Federal Government has recently introduced measures to improve their lives.

Some NGOs have chided the Sabah authorities for their apathy when issuing identity cards (IC) to indigenous people. It is an irony that many bumiputeras do not have ICs while foreign workers receive PR status soon after they enter the state.

Today, some of the indigenous children in the most remote areas do not go school. Many rural schools are small and do not even have basic facilities. The Federation of Chinese Sabah has claimed that some 250,000 Chinese are living along poverty margin (*Daily Express*, 9/2/08).

(Note: Read the full article in the NECF website.)

PRAY

1) State government and local authorities:

- Justice and fairness in governance
- Impartiality, sincerity, commitment and diligence in improving people's living standard and eradicating poverty, especially those living in the interior.
- No discrimination based on race and religion in the administration of all public services

2) Federal Government

- To carry out the development projects that it has promised to the state, and give the state equal focus as with the other states
- To be wise and impartial in implementing the Sabah Corridor projects.
- To resolve the migrant problems effectively and humanely.

3) All to uphold and respect religious freedom

4) Against the spirit of overzealousness and intentional discrimination based on religion

5) Church: Unity and help one another; commitment to bear living testimony of Christ; seek to advance the Gospel; active role in social concerns; guard against political influence, nominalism and complacency.

China On May 12, a massive earthquake hit Sichuan Province, a mountainous region in Western China. By June 1, the official confirmed death toll from China's worst quake in 30 years was 69,016, with another 18,830 people missing.

Meanwhile, nearly 200,000 people had been evacuated. Over 15 million people have been left homeless, raising fears of disease outbreaks in affected areas.

Nearly 2,000 of the dead were students and teachers caught in schools that collapsed. Psychological counselling and school rebuilding are the two big challenges local educational authorities are facing. The focus is on assessing how to rebuild schools quickly.

The government has responded swiftly to the disaster, mobilising the army for the search and rescue operation and welcoming international help and aid.

Pray for distribution of aid, that it will reach the victims. Towns and villages along the main roads have been well covered but villages difficult to reach need more aid. Some self-organised volunteers with better transport, knowledge and equipment are doing well in filling the gaps.

The earthquake has left thousands of children orphaned or without proper parental care. According to The Star (May 31), social workers have helped to reunite more than 7,000 children separated from their parents after the quake, but some 1,000 children remain unclaimed. Pray they will be well-cared for by the authorities and welfare organisations in the meantime. Pray against abuse and violence on the helpless children.

Pray for rebuilding of lives and reconstruction efforts. May God's comfort be upon all who are suffering. May the Church of China rise in this hour of great need to bring God's healing and peace to those in grief.

Myanmar On May 3, Cyclone Nargis ripped through Myanmar's Irrawaddy delta. The toll of injured, dead and missing is spiralling upwards at a horrendous rate. On May 6, the state television reported that 10,000 perished in the town of Bogalay alone. Rescue operations was difficult due to the remoteness of the disaster region which is a major rice-producing area and home to 24 million people. The risk of disease is high. However, Cyclone Nargis has blown open a door. The junta, which has ruled the country since 1962, has kept Myanmar closed, isolated and violently repressed for decades. However, in view of the massive destruction, it finally relented and issued an appeal for international assistance.

However, aid organisations have been frustrated at the difficulties faced in delivering aid to 2.4 million victims. The disaster has left 133,000 people dead or missing. Nearly one month after the storm, only 40 percent of people in need have received any help, according to the United Nations. Pray for all obstacles to be cleared so that aid can reach the victims. Bless the aid workers who have sacrificed much to help the victims. Pray for strength, good spirit, and unity as they come from various organisations throughout the world.

While Burma's 70 percent ethnic Burmese majority is strongly Buddhist, the ethnic minorities are mainly Christian. Today, Myanmar's corrupt, repressive military junta views the church as a prevalent threat and so seeks to destroy it. The junta also represses and persecutes the mostly Christian ethnic minorities and is waging a genocidal war against the ethnic Karen in the east. Isolation and repression escalated after a major crackdown in 1988 and again after an influx of arms in 2005.

In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis

and the ongoing persecution of the people living in Myanmar, pray that many will be drawn to the Lord. May the Myanmar Christians be filled with the Holy Spirit as they serve the Lord amidst great affliction.

Pray for all Myanmar pastors, Christian leaders and teachers who are inside the country, in the refugee camps, and especially those who are presently fleeing or suffering in terror. May the Holy Spirit fill them with the wisdom, faith, grace and strength to shepherd the Lord's flock through these difficult times.

Lebanon When Lebanon's US-backed government took bold steps against Iran-backed Hezbollah on May 6, Hezbollah responded with lethal force. While the Lebanese Army watched on, Hezbollah blockaded all the roads to the airport, shut down all pro-government media and seized control of western Beirut. Dozens have been killed in the fighting.

There is the real danger of a civil war erupting between the Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims.

Iran-sponsored Hezbollah is consolidating in Southern Lebanon to wage war/jihad on Israel. If that happens, it will really be a regional war waged by proxies and exploited by terrorists on Lebanese soil, and Lebanon's one million-strong Christian minority would be caught in the middle. The security of Israel is also at stake as Iran's goal is Israel's elimination – a feat that would secure its position as the leader of the Muslim world.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to keep God's people focused on Him. May they fear no evil (Psalm 23:4) knowing that God is in the midst of those who hold him as holy. Pray that the whole Middle East become known, not as a region of conflict, but as a region of peace where the God of the Bible is worshipped.