

## Playing the religion card

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**KHOO YING HOOI**

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*In Malaysia, religious diversity is an important part of its culture. Very often, especially recently, religion has been at the centre of political debate. While the “Allah” tussle is still on going, the issues related to religion crop up every now and then.*

With the advancement of social media networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, messages were spread easily and quickly, sparking sensitivity.

These days, a religious tag is put on just about everything and anything. Everything in Malaysia is perceived with a religious spectrum. It has come to a stage where you become a Muslim if you sit in a mosque, or Christian if you sit in a chapel. The result is that Malaysians have become very much confused.

For example, the Solidarity and Charity Organisation (Isco) has recently demanded the Penang authorities to ban the open selling of pork because it is against Muslim sensitivity. So does it also mean that we need to have Muslim markets and non-Muslim markets now?

The level of religious sensitivity is not the same as it was before. If it were, then we would have no problem now.

Malaysia has been constantly “qualifying” itself on world press for mostly ridiculous reasons. Under the headline “Pig photos censored in Malaysia”, Al-Jazeera carried the news of how the faces of pigs in two photos in the International New York Times were blacked out.

Malaysia has garnered international attention for being the only country in the world that regulates the word “Allah”, making it exclusive for Muslims.

Several independent United Nations human rights experts including the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, has called on Malaysia to reverse its decision on the “Allah” issue, warning that if the issue prolongs, it could have far-reaching implications for religious minorities in the country.

Religious sensitivities are running deep in Malaysia. At this stage, understanding religious beliefs other than our own is very crucial.

Yes, we should be sensitive towards one another, but not overly sensitive.

The government has shied away from liberal reforms as promised, and politicised religious issues to its advantage.

Many have argued that the government deliberately aggravate tensions between Malaysians of different faiths to distract them from the economic hardship, mainly due to hike in prices. It is generally known that the Barisan Nasional is wholly dependent on securing its voter base among the rural Malay community, and their votes are even more crucial after the BN lost their two-thirds majority in the 2008 and 2013 polls.

Most importantly, we should not fall into the “ploy” of politicians and let ourselves divided between Muslims and non-Muslims. Let’s celebrate diversity, Malaysians. - January 27, 2014.

*\* This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider.*

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