VERILY leveraged is the oft repeated criticism of detractors of 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), the nation’s strategic development company. Other accusations include the issue of the company’s lack of transparency, a fair demand on a state-owned investment arm. Once the prime minister announced the name change, he declared that the expansion was meant to benefit all of the population instead of merely the people of Terengganu. And this the country’s investment vehicle will achieve by boosting Malaysia’s economic transformation agenda, the avenue by which the country will become high-income and fully developed by year 2020, at the latest.

Given the calls for greater transparency, 1MDB’s chairman faced the press recently in a 60-minute question-and-answer session to set the record straight and address every issue raised. Thus, was explained the corporation’s much misunderstood, pre-determined, strategic, investment moves, especially in the areas of energy and real estate. Bearing in mind that the paid-up capital is a mere US$1 million (RM3.3 million) pumped in by the prime minister announced the name change, he declared that the expansion was meant to benefit all of the population instead of merely the people of Terengganu. And this the country’s investment vehicle will achieve by boosting Malaysia’s economic transformation agenda, the avenue by which the country will become high-income and fully developed by year 2020, at the latest.

What transparency has done, therefore, is to highlight the prudent but strategic way 1MDB has grown. But, it is the declaration that sets out what is intended to be achieved through these principles. The Declaration of Rukun Negara states: Now therefore, our nation Malaysia, being dedicated:

TO achieving a greater unity for all her peoples;

TO maintaining a democratic way of life;

TO creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared;

TO ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse and cultural traditions; and

TO building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology.

In relation to the third aim to be achieved, it is emphasised that it refers to the “equitable” sharing of wealth and not the “equal” sharing of wealth, and the difference in meaning should be clear to all.

Challenges from religious and racial intolerance, misunderstanding and baiting.

Marcus Aurelius said that, “Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.” Yet in recent memory, we have been horrified by incidents involving cow’s heads, pig’s heads, desecration of places of worship by at worst, people with more insidious agendas, threats to burn holy books, seizures of Bibles and many other untoward incidents. This is greatly misunderstood and exacerbated through the bars and hurtful words traded on social media, even among those who consider themselves friends. We joke that the mild mannered
polite Malaysian turns into a monstrosity are selectively and dishonestly quoted to the precipice. What is worse is that admissions of freedom of religion when it is not exercised responsibly.

Respect for all religions.

Article 3 of the Federal Constitution provides that Islam is the religion of the Federation but other religions may be practiced in private and in harmony in any part of the Federation. Clause (4) of Article 3 further provides that nothing in Article 3 degrades the position of the religion of the Federation. This Article must be respected.

Article 11 of the Federal Constitution provides that every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and to propagate it. However, this is subject to state law and in respect of federal territories, federal law, which may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among any groups professing the religion of Islam.

Let us briefly review the implications of freedom of religion when it is not exercised responsibly.

Child custody cases

Interracial marriages have given rise to a new conflict between civil law and Syariah law in relation to the unilateral conversion as well as custody issues of minor children where only one spouse converts to Islam. The increasing number of cases has also raised allegations of racial discrimination by the courts and authorities.

This applies to the families cannot be overstated, and that is a fact. In this regard, the failure of the converting spouses to resolve the family quarrel and the relevant parties and in fact, attempting to use the civil or Syariah courts to their advantage, jeopardises not only family harmony but potentially national harmony. Consequently, the integrity of the Royal Malaysia Police and the Attorney-General's Chambers is also called into question due to the issue of enforcement of conflicting court orders.

As stated earlier, if the integrity of law enforcement agencies is compromised, it will be detrimental to their ability to garner the respect of the public, which is fundamental to their role and function.

In 2009, amendments were proposed to the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976, the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984 and the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories) Act 1993 to ensure that issues like child support and child custody would be determined by the court in which the marriage was registered. These amendments, however, remain pending.

Bible seizure cases.

In the wake of the controversy of the seizure of Bahasa Malaysia/Indonesia Bibles and other publications under the word "Allah" in 2010, and various threats to burn those Bibles, the government announced the "10-point solution".

As restated in the letter from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to Bishop Ng Moon Hing, chairman, Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), dated April 11, 2011, the 10-point plan was as follows:

"It was intended to be a policy to engage the religious communities with open and honest dialogue. It was designed to be a way forward to engage and resolve the issue of the word 'Allah' and its use in religious contexts in Malaysia.

BEYOND the Bible issue, the government wishes to reiterate its commitment to work with the Christian community to address all religious issues and to promote reconciliation and harmony in any part of the Federation. The government wishes to reassure the Christian community that the word 'Allah' is an important part of our national identity and will continue to work towards ensuring the protection of the rights of all religious communities to practice their religion in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

Despite this, the issue has remained simmering for various reasons, including the recent judicial interpretation of the word 'Allah' and its use in religious contexts in Malaysia. The issue continues to raise concerns and tensions within the community.

If law enforcement agencies, including the Attorney-General's Chambers, are expected to go it alone, their integrity will eventually be questioned by the public.

In that case, the Chambers on June 21, in a statement, clarified that the Bibles were not the Al-Kitab, which are two publications of entirely different characters. The Al-Kitab is the Malay version of the Bible, and meant for Christians and for use in churches, whereas The Herald is a newspaper, which is accessible online and can be read by Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

If enforced, the entire controversy in the whole kalimah "Allah" debate would be whether it could be used to propagate Christianity to Muslims. It is a serious issue of freedom of religion for Christians themselves.

The court also re-emphasised that the Executive was also the best party to resolve the stalemate. It is in the interest of national security and public order. The minister obligations include preventing the threat or violence to occur before making a decision. If there is a potential for such a threat to national security and public order, the court further noted that the minister may not have the actual power to prevent the threat or violence to occur before taking action.

Thus, the court said that if the minister wishes to reiterate its commitment to work with the Christian community to address all religious issues and to promote reconciliation and harmony in any part of the Federation, it must be emphasised that the government wishes to engage the religious communities with open and honest dialogue. It was designed to be a way forward to engage and resolve the issue of the word 'Allah' and its use in religious contexts in Malaysia.

The issue of the seizure of the Bibles from the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) and other publications concerning the word ‘Allah’ from the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) in January 2014 also appears to be finally resolved by the Selangor government's recent announcement that they will be returned. But this was not before the Attorney-General's Chambers, or rather the Attorney-General, was subjected to pressure and criticism on the Attorney-General's decision not to prosecute the case and its directive for the Bibles to be released by the agency that seized it. It is welcomed that sooner or later everybody will come to see the light.

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