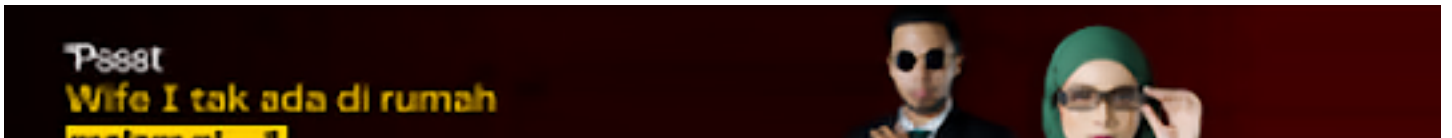


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Beyond apologies and the fine line between humour and insult in Malaysia

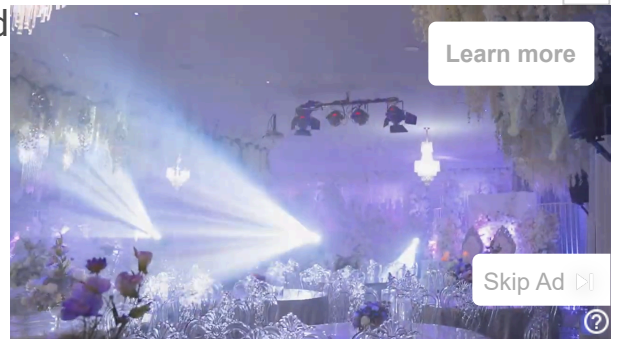
Malaysia may be peaceful on the outside, but a recent incident away from the unthinkable.



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By SYAZA SHUKRI [Follow](#)

30 Mar 2025 12:43pm





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WHO is the more serious offender when it comes to religious insensitivity? I believe this is not a question we should entertain.

In light of the controversy surrounding three radio DJs caught on camera making fun of the k question rhetorically.

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Where credit is due, Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) came out with a statement clarifying that making fun of another religion is against Islam. Islam teaches respect for others' beliefs.

Do not take my word for it. Read the Qur'an. I think it is fair to call those who mock other religions as extremists because they have deviated from the paths.

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Of course, Islam is also a religion of forgiveness and mercy. Since the DJs have apologised, I believe the issues have been solved. This opinion is not to say that they are Muslims. Even in previous statements, I maintained that accepting an apology



An honest apology occurs immediately after a mistake, whereas a dishonest apology is right before one is to be called for a statement by the police. I believe in this case, the perpetrators and Astro have taken necessary actions to show they do not tolerate such actions.

But what worries me are some people online questioning the so-called silence of Malay leaders when Islam is being insulted. This is why I posed the question: Should it be a competition on who is worse?

My threshold for someone insulting Islam is when it is done purposely with malice. The best example for me was the “Selamat Berbuka Puasa (with Bak Kut Teh)” picture, which was posted during Ramadan 2016. It was obviously done with the intention to provoke. I believe if someone makes fun of an Islamic ritual, there is no doubt they need to answer to their misdeeds.

We live in a society that values stability and collective peace. Freedom of expression comes with responsibilities.

Why do we want to compare the actions and responses from different ethnic or religious groups? Of course, again, I'm being rhetorical. I know the answer. The

Like it or not, everything is viewed and judged based on a person's race and religion. Instead of claiming that religion is insulted more, we should be looking at those who threaten national harmony. It is a (and they are the ones who made the insulting “joke.”

Similarly, when Muslims feel “insulted,” it is the fault of individuals or certain businesses. Why are we quick to claim that an entire ethnic or religious group is against one



another? Who stands to gain from this policy of divide-and-rule? (Again, rhetorical. We know who)

Another point I want to make is how people always say that Malaysia is in reality a peaceful nation. Look at the bazaar during Ramadan. We see people from all backgrounds coming together to join in this uniquely Malaysian festival. Yes, sometimes there are skirmishes, such as people asking for non-fasting patrons to give way to those fasting. But in general, Malaysians can live side by side harmoniously.

But do we?

While we co-exist peacefully, I contend that an individual's online persona reflects their true self. Protected by anonymity, I would argue that what people say online is how they really feel.

At bazaars or mamaks, people are putting on a mask because of what I said earlier about collective stability and harmony. But when the masks are off, we can see their true self very clearly. And it is not just division; it is resentment towards each other.

Malaysia may be peaceful on the outside, but we are just one incident away from the unthinkable. People who think ugly things about others may unexpectedly say things out loud during TikTok jokes with friends and family.

They keep it for more private occasions, but it is no longer private.

The solution, of course, is to figure out who is so bigoted. Is it the media? Is it the leadership? Is it the community? We need to stop people from being mean to others.

Some may argue that we cannot police thoughts, especially if they are not hurting anyone. But my counterargument is, are



we waiting for someone to get hurt before more proactive measures are taken?

Another important note is on “in-group policing,” a term I learned at the peak of the so-called Global War on Terror. It is more effective for people from a specific background to warn their own people rather than for others to do that.

For instance, it is good for Jakim to comment on the recent issue, given the involvement of Muslims. If a non-Muslim group does so, it could spiral.

While this does not preclude others from commenting, in-group policing is much more effective. Therefore, we need allies across racial and religious groups to make others sympathetic and take action on their own people.

If prevention is better than cure, we should do all we can so that Malaysians would not even think about making fun of others, not out of fear of authorities, but out of decency.

Syaza Shukri, PhD, is an associate professor and the current Head at the Department of Political Science, IIUM. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of Sinar Daily.

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