

Count your blessings as Malaysians

MY VIEW -
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WHILE Malaysia and its diverse population celebrates Eidul Fitri peacefully across all cultures and beliefs, different countries have different stories to tell. Some are not so lucky as in the case of Sudan where talks over a transition to civil government turned bloody. Libya was still gunning for Tripoli, and migrants from other war-torn countries continued to suffer especially women and children. The lessons of Ramadan seem to have trickled down very little in saving humanity as it is intended to do.

It is heart-wrenching to read reports on what is taking place behind China's "hi-tech" curtain. For a long time many suspected that all was not right in the country with reference to minorities.

For Muslims, for example, stories were rife of a million from different ethnic origins being kept in "confinement" centres.

But there was no confirmation until recently when the centres were dubbed as "vocational education centres" teaching Mandarin and Chinese laws aimed at keeping the inmates away from extremism so to speak.

The Xinjiang government was reported to have said that religious activities "are not allowed" in the so-called educational facilities.

One would have thought the reverse, as Islam is a religion of peace to begin with. The more one is familiarised with the "real" teaching the better it would be to avert the notion of extremism. Somehow this is not the case for some reason. They are allowed to practise Islam only on their weekend off at home.

Satellite images taken in 2015 show clearly a blue hexagon-shaped building with a dome known as Aksu Resta Grand Mosque in Aksu, Xinjiang Province. Two years later the mosque was missing. This reportedly was one of dozens of mosques and religious sites systematically destroyed.

More recently, AFP noted that some of the mosques had been "repurposed" for public use or turned to parking lots.

Even when the mosques were there, worshippers had to go through stringent checks and surveillance as though it was intended to deter them, especially the youth, from congregating – an act encouraged in Islam as part of communal living. Now they have only to contend with what is

claimed as state-approved houses of worship monitored by security personnel, some in plainclothes.

The so-called “protection of religious freedom” is nothing more than a closely monitored hi-tech security that borders on paranoia.

Allegedly, Chinese leaders are “investing billions of dollars every year, in making Xinjiang an incubator for increasingly intrusive policing systems that could spread across the country and beyond,” akin to the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project.

On more mundane aspects, anything that portrays outward signs of religious affiliation are being curtailed. And so are displays of Islamic values and traditions. This includes the use of halal signs that foreign visitors found most helpful.

All these developments fly in the face of OBOR that China has been peddling hard worldwide, including to Muslim countries like Malaysia without uttering a word about what is happening to its Muslim citizens.

As an example, the oasis city of Kashgar, a renowned ancient Silk Road landmark, is now considered one of the most endangered Islamic cities in Central Asia. It is no longer what it was despite being a key city on the Silk Road.

Since 2009, the Chinese government has had an ambitious plan called “Kashgar Dangerous House Reform” programme to knock down mosques, markets and centuries-old houses making up to 85% of the Old City. The programme is doing to Kashgar’s Old City what a succession of conquerors failed to accomplish, that is, to level it for good.

Lest we forget, for much of this time, most Silk Road traders coming from western Eurasia were Muslims, and they brought their beliefs and rich culture to millions of people. Although the Silk Road was a two-way route, most of its movement was eastward, carrying Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and later, Islam.

This historical reality will soon be lost as there is no longer any evidence of the vibrancy of Islam being echoed throughout the city which is the lifeline of the ancient Silk Road, that is before the imposition of draconian security measures.

Meaning, what is left is just another attempt to secularise the Chinese society at the expense of the millions who wish to keep their religious faith which China increasingly tends to regard as an “existential threat”, according to some expert opinions – all bottled up in OBOR that Malaysia will be part of.

Under such circumstances, we Malaysians may want to count our blessings despite the ups and downs, before the toxic wave of the “new” Silk Road hits us in a way we never imagined. China will always maintain that it is the “correct” way to go like it did for the 30th anniversary of the bloody Tiananmen Square tragedy.