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The fire of hope burns brighter



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We have seen how disasters like the massive blaze caused by the Putra Heights gas pipeline fire and Covid-19 pandemic can draw all of us closer.

SELDOM do two tragedies turn into hope, but that was what I witnessed happening to this nation in the past week.

We had the tragedy of hate speeches and statements by ordinary Malaysians, irresponsible preachers and an even more irresponsible mufti of one state fuelling the fires of hatred between two of our communities.

The other tragedy that shook us literally and physically was the massive blaze caused by a gas explosion in Putra Heights, Subang Jaya.

The scene of the devastating incident caught us off-guard in the early morning of the second day of Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

It was like something we only see in movies or documentaries of volcanic eruptions, or man's folly against one another in the form of a nuclear detonation.

I seldom talk or write about divine intervention or divine providence although I do write and speak a lot about faiths and religion.

I just saw that the two tragedies

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## Over the top

seem to add to a kind of hope that may see us through this period of unrest in our nation.

The first tragedy of hate was fuelled by the issue of relocating a 130-year-old temple in Kuala Lumpur that was constructed well before any laws of zoning or municipal ownership even existed. The temple was, is and will be used as a place of worship by the Malaysian Hindu community.

The Hindu community had migrated here in the past 200 years to work in plantations, among other things, and had built many temples and objects of sacred worship.

As modern cities and laws were established, these temples faced the wrath of municipal officers who probably never had a real history lesson, and also from those who never understood the idea of conserving and preserving heritage sites and activities deemed cultural to a community and thus to a nation.

When the land on which said temple was located was "secretly" sold to a corporate entity, the issue became a Hindu-versus-Muslim hate narrative.

What I read on social media on the issue frightened me to the core – not politicians but independent religious preachers and social media influencers were whipping up a frenzy of hate narratives.

The worst was one mufti of a state who expressed his opinion condemning not only the Hindu community but also their faith. I was truly shocked and saddened by this one act of a person who has the largest influence and carried the largest responsibility of religion. But he obviously has never heard of the concepts of

nation-building and living harmoniously with others.

Meanwhile, many homes were damaged by the blaze in Putra Heights, and a few were completely destroyed. Cars damaged by the intense heat had to be totally written off.

There were also serious cases of burns, but thankfully there were no loss of human lives.

Nevertheless, I am still frightened that this could have happened, considering the horrors of the Myanmar earthquake.

That was a close call, Malaysians. I have absolutely no idea what foolishness allowed the zoning for housing so close to an underground carrier of death in the form of methane gas.

But amid the horrors of both tragedies, suddenly news of a Hindu temple becoming a triage centre emerged, followed by reports of several mosques being opened for anyone regardless of faith to seek shelter and aid.

Recently, the Sultan of Selangor ordered Majlis Agama Islam Selangor to use its financial cof-

fers to provide aid to all victims of the fire.

I repeat – all the victims regardless of race or religion. Amid the folly of urban planners came the real spirituality of faith to help all mankind in the face of hardship and tragedy.

We have seen how disasters like this and the Covid-19 pandemic can draw all of us closer. But do we need to have fiery explosions or the threat of a deadly virus for us to admit that we are all equal under the sun, and that our differences are largely our own making?

Why can't we unmake our own making so that we can help all the poor and destitute, and ignore the voices of hatred by social media influencers, politicians and, yes, even religious leaders?

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