

E D I T O R I A L

Distinct



The passengers crouched in deathly terror as the plane tossed violently in mid-air. Some screamed helplessly, some wailed hopelessly, many prayed silently. Then the flight stewardesses started handing out blank sheets of paper and told the passengers to write notes to their loved ones. Farewell notes! Whatever hope the passengers had up to then vanished.

But miraculously, the pilot managed to steer the plane through the storm to safety. When the plane finally grounded to a halt, one passenger told the person sitting beside her, "Thank Jesus. He answered my prayer." The other person retorted, "No. Thank Buddha. He answered our prayers."

Gone are the days when miracles and material blessings were the domain of Christianity. Today, devotees of other faiths are increasingly experiencing signs and wonders. Miraculous healing of terminal illnesses, visions of their gods, increased material prosperity, excellent examination results – these and many other 'answered prayers' have led them to deeper conviction of their faiths and greater allegiance to their gods.

This increased religious fervour in other faiths – evidenced in vigorous

missionary activities – has made Christian evangelism more difficult.

Globally, Islam is on the rise with reports of increasing conversion rate in the West while Christianity is waning there. Closer to home, Buddhism, in keeping with the times, has become more contemporary in its worship with tambourine dancers, upbeat music and songs. And like the Church, temples today also conduct weekly Sunday School classes.

Gone also are the days when the world associated charitable acts with Christians – when hospitals, schools for the underprivileged, shelters for children, women and any needy ones, were the labour of the Church. Today, devotees of other faiths are ministering in like

disappearance of God from the modern worldview, which has made us vulnerable to the incorporation of a domesticated Jesus into other religious worldviews.

Firstly, we must rediscover the meaning of *truth*, and this we can find in the Bible. Without a solid conviction of what and Whom we believe, we will become victims of a philosophy of pluralism, which assumes there are no absolute truths.

While we enjoy a level of freedom in the verbal proclamation of the gospel, our claims to absolute truth are often viewed with suspicion. The modern assumption, largely unquestioned, is that beliefs are mainly a matter of preference, that there is no ultimate reality, and therefore all absolute statements about

Our willingness to suffer loss in this life is the only sure witness of the reality of our hope beyond this life.

passion to the poor in society.

How can our Christian witness stand out against this scenario? How can we share the gospel effectively in the midst of the growing religious fervour in other faiths? How can we share the gospel amidst the influence of permissive western culture and globalisation, which has brought unhealthy modern culture and new religion? How can we counter post modernism in our pluralistic society, which has created even more serious problems: loss of faith; the

our faith are regarded as arrogant. But as someone put it, "It is better to stand alone on the side of truth than to stand with the majority on the side of half-truths and lies".

Secondly, as a Church, we need to involve ourselves in society, not as a 'powerful' institution seeking to pressure others, but rather as a community of believing Christians seeking to bring biblical truths to our fellow members of

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Principles On the Exercise of Spiritual Gifts

WE praise Almighty God for raising great men and women of faith in these last days to declare His glory, to preach the good news of His Son Jesus Christ and to love and minister to the needy, sick and dying by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are overwhelmed by God's gifts of service. We know that it is not because of any qualification on our part but due to His grace and empowerment alone. We acknowledge that those who exercise spiritual gifts are not better than others but equal, and with the added responsibility to be accountable to Him at the day of reckoning.

We reaffirm that He alone is the Saviour, Healer, Provider and the One who bestows every blessing. We

as to claim absolute certainty of His will or His way. While His Word to us is un- changing, we pledge never to make irrefutable statements about how it should be applied to situations.

We regard the matter of our teaching of others with the utmost responsibility, knowing that lives can be beautifully transformed or tragically destroyed because of our words. We promise to teach uncompromisingly but with a temperate, wise and loving spirit, always aware of the adverse implications for mankind and the Kingdom of God.

We undertake at all times to maintain high ethical standards and to be seen to maintain high ethical standards. We reject every effort to

“We reaffirm that He alone is the Saviour, Healer, Provider and the One who bestows every blessing.”

reject all attempts by His servants, no matter how greatly used, to interpose or to share in the glory and worship that belongs to Him alone.

We recognise that we differ in our views concerning the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are united, however, in our desire to see God glorified at all times. We never want to see the name of Jesus Christ mired in controversy or besmirched in any way.

We believe, above all, in God's Sovereignty to move as and when He wills, according to His infinite wisdom and perfect knowledge. Although His ways are not our ways, we are certain that, whatever the outcome, “all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. (Rom. 8:28)

We undertake, in our words and deeds, to never be so pre- sumptuous

omit information, exaggerate or falsify claims of signs and wonders, as this is displeasing and contrary to the nature of God.

For this reason also, we agree to have a submissive spirit, allowing God to use others, such as a local church or an overseeing committee, to hold us accountable, to dispense wise counsel and, if necessary, even rebuke. We uphold this willingly because we know that the whole is more important than the parts, and that the Church is a community and not individualistic.

In our ministry, our thoughts and actions will be predicated on compassion, love and humility and we will never judge or lay low another believer because of prejudices about his or her convictions or practices. The gifts that God has given us are always to “build up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12) and never to destroy. //

Tables taken up



Farewell to a dear friend and a faithful servant



THE Council and Staff of NECF Malaysia join the family of the late Elder Timothy Phua in mourning and celebrating his return to the Lord on Jan 4.

We grieve that he is no longer with us and we will miss his fellowship, wise counsel and wry humour. Yet, we rejoice that his wish to be united with the Lord – a desire he has expressed since last year – is now fulfilled.

Timothy, an elder of The Word Centre, was a significant partner of NECF. He helped to arrange free-interest loans to purchase our present building, and contributed generously in cash and kind not only to NECF but also to many other ministries.

As NECF's partner, he served faithfully as treasurer of a few major NECF events, including the 1999 Emmanuel Celebration and 2000 Breakthrough Conference & Rally. At the time of his departure, he was a board of the newly established NECF Foundation.

Timothy left behind his wife, Mary, and three daughters – Selina, Pr Elaine and Pr Tammie – and three grandchildren.



SEVERAL tables for the NECF Foundation fund-raising dinner cum launch have already been snapped up even before churches and Christians are officially invited to sponsor the 70 tables. Cash contribution of the tables range from RM1,000 to RM10,000 per table.

The dinner will officially launch the foundation that was recently established to provide financial and other aid to pastors, full-time workers and their families when no other avenue of assistance is available from their local church, denomination or any other source. It will be held on April 3 at the J.W.Marriott Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

The foundation – a follow-up to the successful NECF Pastors Prayer Shield campaign started in 2001 to mobilise congregations to pray for their pastors – recognises that pastors and full-time workers also require material assistance besides prayer support.

The foundation is independently governed by an executive board comprising NECF staff and Christians from various denominations.

Those interested to sponsor tables for the dinner may contact Rev Lai Moo Him at the NECF office (tel. 03-7727 8227) or 012-5055836.

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society. In our daily dealings with people around us, we must demonstrate the distinctiveness of Christianity in our lives.

Christians in the marketplace therefore have a high calling. Their testimony of standing up for their faith is the most powerful because it is lived out where it is often the most difficult.

Unfortunately, many do not rise up to the challenge. Some simply make no attempt to be different. Others make excuses for their compromises, sometimes even twisting Scripture. Still others adopt the 'triumphalistic' stand that if they would obey the Lord, deliverance (their definition) would



surely follow. While this has often happened, the approach remains inadequate. Not only does it leave many disappointed, its promises are ultimately no different from the health-and-wealth promises of other religions.

Daniel's three friends expressed the

biblical attitude when they were confronted with the fiery furnace. To King Nebuchadnezzar's threat to throw them into the fiery furnace should they refuse to bow to the golden image, they stoutly said: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it... But even if he does not... we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 13: 17-18)

Our willingness to suffer loss in this life is the only sure witness of the reality of our hope beyond this life.

Unconditional obedience to God's Word in the marketplace will yield the respect and trust of our peers. As we walk the path of obedience, we will be God's agent of redemption and reconciliation of non-believers through Jesus Christ.

The Federal Constitution

Why You Must Defend It



IN February 1957, an independent Commission headed by Rt. Honourable Lord Reid submitted proposals for a new governance and administration for the independent Malaya. Along with them was the draft Constitution based largely on the model of the Constitution of India 1950. Five months later, the British Parliament passed the Federation of Malaya Independence Act 1957 to make provision for the Federation of Malaya to be established as an independent sovereign country within the commonwealth. The Federation of Malaya Agreement (Aug 5, 1957) and the Federal Constitution Ordinance No. 55 (Aug 27, 1957) followed.

Thus, the Reid Commission remarked: "A Federal Constitution defines and guarantees the rights of the Federation and the States; it is usual and in our opinion right that it should also define and guarantee certain fundamental individuals rights which are generally regarded as essential conditions for a free and democratic way of life."

Although constitutional amendments require the vote of not less than two-thirds of the total members of each House of Parliament, it has been amended 41 times from 1957 to 1996,¹ to accommodate the inclusion of new states into the 1963 federation, and in response to various political tensions.

Still, why should we defend our constitution? "The collapse of the Constitution is the collapse of the nation." This remark was made by Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Sept 29, 2003, who was then the deputy prime minister and now our prime minister. Because the Federal Constitution is the backbone of our country's sovereignty and pillar for the nation's overall stability, it is therefore important for us to respect and uphold the provisions in the Constitution as affirmed by Datuk Badawi.

As responsible Christians, it is helpful to know our constitutional rights so that we know how to rightly respond to and pray against actions that challenge our religious rights. Following are some of the provisions (out of 183 articles) concerning our rights and freedom to worship the Lord Jesus Christ:

Article 3

(1) Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.

Article 4

(1) This Constitution is the supreme law of the Federation and any law passed after Merdeka Day which is inconsistent with this Constitution shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void.

Article 8

(1) All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law.

(2) Except as expressly authorised by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth in any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.

Article 10

(1) Subject to Clauses (2), (3) and (4):

(a) every citizen has the right to freedom of speech and expression; (b) all citizens have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms; (c) all citizens have the right to form associations.

(2) Parliament may by law impose:

(a) on the rights conferred by paragraph (a) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or of any Legislative Assembly or to provide against contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to any offence;

(b) on the right conferred by paragraph (b) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, or public order;

(c) on the right conferred by paragraph (c) of Clause (1), such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, public order or morality.

(3) Restrictions on the right to form associations conferred by paragraph (c) of Clause (1) may also be imposed by any law relating to labour or education.

(4) In imposing restrictions in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof or public order under Clause (2) (a), Parliament may pass law prohibiting the questioning of any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of Part III, article 152, 153 or 181 otherwise than in relation to the implementation thereof as may be specified in such law.

Article 11

(1) Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.

(2) No person shall be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.

(3) Every religious group has the right to: manage its own religious affairs; establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.

(4) State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.

(5) This Article does not authorise any act contrary to any

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Vigorous Defence Stops Dress Code Ruling

PAS finally withdrew its controversial dress code ruling after 11 days of vocal objections and criticisms from local and international organisations.

PAS' inevitable action was a triumph, albeit a small one, to citizens' rights of speech, expression and religious practices as enshrined in Article 11 of the Federal Constitution, and shows just how important it is to rigorously defend our rights, even on seemingly trivial matters.

The issue started on Jan 4 when the Kuala Terengganu Municipal Council (KTMC) under the PAS government announced its decision to ban non-Muslim women from wearing what it has specified to be indecent attire during office hours. The decision was made without consulting other religious leaders.

While Muslim women must adhere to the Islamic dress code, non-Muslim women in the private sector in Terengganu will not be allowed to wear short-sleeved blouses, tight-fitting jeans, long skirts with slits or mini-skirts during working hours. Skirt length must fall below the knee, according to the ruling.

Employers whose staff fail to adhere to the new ruling will risk losing their business licence or be fined up to a maximum of RM250. The new ruling was introduced because dress code is a "morality issue" and women's provocative dressing has been closely linked to murders, rapes, molest and sexual abuses, according to Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang in its defence for KTMC's ruling.

The ruling showed PAS' tendency to blame women for social ills, and encouraged the misperception of dressing as a cause of criminal acts. The ruling is not only insensitive to the pluralistic make-up of our society, but also a serious infringement upon the basic rights of individuals, especially women – both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Constitutionally, it transgresses the Federal laws protecting individual rights of speech, expression and religious practices. Furthermore, dictating dress code does not solve the crime problem nor increase religious piety because "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (James 1:14).

The ruling also indicated PAS' inconsistency in policy-making and insincerity in its promises to non-Muslims which the party made during the launch of its Islamic State document.

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general law relating to public order, public health or morality.

Article 12

(2) Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion, and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law; but it shall be lawful for the Federation or a State to establish or maintain or assist in establishing or maintaining Islamic institutions or provide or assist in providing instruction in the religion of Islam and incur such expenditure as may be necessary for the purpose.

(3) No person shall be required to receive instruction in or take part in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion other than his own.

Another Attempt to Revive Islamic State Issue

NECF Malaysia has cautioned that religious harmony in the country may be disrupted if the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) went ahead with its plan to release a book titled "Malaysia, an Islamic State".

It was reported in a local daily that IKIM would launch the book in February to explain that Malaysia is considered an Islamic state because its legal, economic and social systems is based on Islam. IKIM is a government think-tank on Islam.

Immediately following the report, NECF issued a statement calling IKIM to consult religious leaders first before even considering launching the book. "The understanding of an Islamic state is still very controversial and misunderstood at this point in time.

"The publication of the book that presents a particular point of view may lead to confusion instead of clarification. The exact meaning and intended purpose of the book will also be questioned. This is especially so when no opportunity is given to other religious communities or their leaders either to review or to comment on the book," the statement said.

NECF urged IKIM not to repeat the past mistake of the Ministry of Information, which in 2001 had to withdraw its book *Malaysia Adalah Sebuah Negara Islam* (Malaysia is an Islamic Country) after much public protest.

Then, Hadi Awang had repeatedly stressed that "the rights of the non-Muslim community as enshrined in the Federal Constitution in regard to right to religious beliefs and cultural practices, right to secure business opportunity and private property, right to political association, right to education, and mother-tongue education as also enshrined by the United Nation Declaration of Human Rights, are fully secured."

Cheongsam with slits (and sometimes without sleeves) and short-sleeved *saree* blouses are the cultural dressing of the Chinese and Indian communities respectively. Hadi Awang had also, at the launch, promised to adhere to the practice of *shura* (consultation) but the party had failed to consult the other religious leaders before deciding on the dress code ruling.

(4) For the purposes of Clause (3), the religion of a person under the age of eighteen years shall be decided by his parent or guardian.

Article 75

If any State law is inconsistent with a federal law, the federal law shall prevail and the State law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void. – *Contributed by NECF Malaysia Research Executive Lim Siew Foong*

Reference:

Federal Constitution of Malaysia – A Commentary. Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Current Law Journal Sdn Bhd, 1986
Federal Constitution (as at 10th Sept. 2002). Petaling Jaya, Sel.: International Law Book Services, 2002

Footnote: ¹ PL Tan, 'Malaysia' in PL Tan (ed), *Asian Legal Systems: Law, Society and Pluralism in East Asia*, Sydney, Butterworths, 1997, p271

Faith and Feng Shui

Nature plays a major role in *feng shui* practice.

BY DR CHAN GEOK OON

How can *feng shui* maximise your luck for the year? You have probably come across this in an advertisement. You may also have heard or read about someone who struck a lottery after rearranging his furniture according to certain *feng shui* principles. You may even have been told to place a certain plant at a certain corner of your living room to improve the *feng shui* of your home.

What is *feng shui*? Why do people – from the highly educated to the illiterate, from the East to the West – believe in it? In the last two decades, the interest in *feng shui* has caught on globally. In fact, one of the non-fiction best sellers listed by *The Star* for the week ending last Nov. 16 was *Flying Star Feng Shui for Period 8* by Lillian Too.

Feng shui, literally “wind water” in Chinese, is the study of ancient Chinese philosophy of nature. It is often identified as a form of geomancy – that is divination by means of geographic features – and is mainly concerned with understanding the relationship between nature and man so that man might live in harmony within the environment. Its original focus was to provide auspicious burial site for the dead but this was later expanded to include providing auspicious structures for the living, fortune-telling, and

prescribing remedies to people who have poor *feng shui*, and thus, miserable lives.

In ancient days, *feng shui* was conscientiously sought after and utilised by the Chinese emperors, especially in the building of imperial palaces and for personal power and success. The Imperial City in Beijing is a great example of good *feng shui* construction and landscaping as the environment and structure conform to the best *feng shui* principles. For a long time the knowledge of *feng shui* was closely guarded from the enemies. Later, it was confined to the upper ruling classes.

When a person says he has good *feng shui*, it probably refers to his state of well-being resulting from arranging his surrounding in auspicious harmony with the natural environment. Given that human being has a natural tendency to interact with nature, the ultimate goal is to capture the intrinsic energy or *shen chi* that moves around the atmosphere, to attract or harness all the good fortune that one can desire: wealth, health, success and happiness. Since the Creator God exists in every human heart, the natural environment – as opposed to our modern scientific desert – testifies to His existence.

In general, the practice of *feng shui* draws upon the fundamental concepts of the ancient Chinese view of the universe, which requires an

understanding of balancing *yin* and *yang* forces and harmonising the combinations of the five elements – fire, earth, metal, water, and wood. Among the Chinese, *feng shui* technology is commonly applied to designing, construction, orientation and decoration of buildings in order to “tap into the beneficial energies that cause intangible forces to generate good fortune,” according to Lillian Too’s *Feng Shui Fundamentals: FAME*.

Science, Superstition or Art?

Certain *feng shui* experts like to call it a science while others look at it as an art. In his two interesting articles on migratory birds and the lemming animals respectively, the Malaysian *feng shui* master Dr Ong Hean Tatt used *feng shui* principles to scientifically explain the interconnection of the 12-year zodiac cycle with climatic and environmental changes.

Indeed, *feng shui* can be very exact in its calculations to get the best location, form, structure and decoration of a dwelling place. It also demands careful interpretation and subjective evaluation, and intuition. This is perhaps why women are sometimes considered more efficient in undertaking *feng shui* analysis because they are more intuitive and

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Some of the objects feng shui believers place in their homes or offices to attract good fortune.



detail oriented.

The *feng shui* language is full of symbolism. Besides the *yin* and *yang* symbol and the five elements mentioned above, there are the trigrams, the octagonal *pa kua* symbol, and the nine sector of the *lo*

shu grid. Others are symbolic of abstract aspirations such as longevity, happiness, fame, wealth, and fertility in marriage.

For example, placing the frog with a coin in its mouth outside the main entrance of the house is expected to bring wealth to the family. The crane symbolises longevity and a pair of mandarin ducks symbolises happiness in love. Jars attract *chi* to settle when placed near the entrance of the house. Fan is a symbol of protection for the home. Likewise, placing the umbrella at the front part of the lobby is believed to ward off burglars. The mystic knot indicates a never-ending cycle of good fortune. There are many other symbols believed to attract or activate the energy that brings good luck.

"The cosmic breath of the dragon is the ultimate *shen chi*," says a well-known geomancer. The "symbol of the dragon is the ultimate *yang* symbol", and it is also said to be the "ultimate symbol of good luck." Obviously the dragon is the centre of *feng shui* considerations. To most Chinese, it is a symbol of good fortune. Therefore it is highly desirable and is even revered or worshiped as a good luck charm.

Harmless decorations?

It may seem harmless and attractive to utilise some of the symbols as decorations. But for Christians, there is a danger that we may unconsciously put our trust in them to bring good fortune. When that happens, we insult God because it indicates greed and a lack of trust in Him. Such practices amount to idolatry. Col.3:5 says, "...Don't be greedy which is the same as worshiping idols."

Christians need to make choices that lead to either ultimate good and divine blessings or total destruction, even if we gain the whole world in the interim period. "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?"

"Christians need to make choices that lead to either ultimate good and divine blessings or total destruction, even if we gain the whole world in the interim period."

The *feng shui* literature and advertisements are definitely enticing, feeding on our fleshly desires. In her book "*Feng shui and Wealth*," Lilian Too says: "Earth luck is *feng shui*... Earth luck helps you to enhance good heaven luck, thus expanding the scale of your successes during good times, and bringing you good fortune and prosperity. It also modifies inauspicious heaven luck, helping you overcome difficulties and loss during astrological bad times."

We Christians can be enticed by mammon if we are not alert. It is worth reminding ourselves of James 1: 14-15, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desires has conceived it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

A professional *feng shui* consultant, advertised his course this way: "Learn the crux of the 'Moving Stars' and the 'Shien Kong Moving Stars' Schools which are practised by top Hong Kong Geomancers. You will be able to forecast events and adjust the *feng shui* to either enhance or neutralise them. Thus you become the Master of Your Destiny! When you conclude this level, you will have attained the standard of a respected Hong Kong Geomancer."

Wouldn't you be fascinated? There is an innate desire to satisfy our curiosity of the unknown, to learn the secrets of our future and the hidden things. God has made it such that we want to find out about our future (Eccl. 3:14) with the intended purpose of seeking Him and to fear Him alone. Unfortunately people create schemes to bypass God's way.

"Curiosity kills the cat", so the saying goes. The moment we have an interest in things of the occult, we make an opening

to the influences of the enemy. When we seek them out, the enemy wastes no time to be found.

Our future is in God's hand. The secret things belong to the Lord (Deut. 29:29). As Christians we are forbidden to dabble in or have any dealings with the elemental or nether world spirits. In Christ we have died to the elemental spirits of the universe. C. S. Lewis claims that pantheism is the natural bend of human mind because deep down in every human heart, God exists.

The Deceiver may grasp every opportunity, through the large number of symbolism used in *feng shui* to make man pantheistic instead of just worshiping the one true living God. When the human minds are obsessed with *feng shui* which promises them everything that they desire, they then have no need for God, let alone worship Him. – This article is contributed by the NECF Malaysia Research Commission.

Thanksgiving Tea To Strengthen Prayer Network

LEADERS of prayer groups within the Klang Valley gathered at the NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission Thanksgiving Tea last December for a time of reflection and thanksgiving for the intercession ministry in the country. Many among the 147 participants were attending this annual get-together for the first time.

The participation of the newcomers – prayer leaders of churches and para-church organisations – signalled the increasing prayer awareness and mobilisation within the nation, and the realisation among churches for the need to network in prayer. Held at New Life Restoration Centre, Petaling Jaya, the gathering was also a time for the prayer leaders to discuss the coming year's events.

NECF Executive Secretary (Prayer) Ann Low reflected on the past year's activities while NECF Prayer Commission Chairman Grace Hee shared the activities that have been planned for the coming year. Participants also agreed to hold a prayer consultation (the first for the commission) in May. NECF Executive Secretary (Research) Lim Siew Foong enlightened the participants on the current issues and threats facing the country that required urgent intercession.



NECF: Executive Summary

Listing Not Fair

Does the Malaysian Government impose legislation or policies that discriminate certain religions? The US Government believes so. In its **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** report of the 2003 International Religious Freedom Report, it listed Malaysia among the top nine countries in the section under "Discriminatory Legislation or Policies Disadvantaging Certain Religions". The summary was released last December by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour of the US Department of State.

THE section stated: "Some governments have implemented laws or regulations that favour certain religions and place others at a disadvantage. Often this circumstance results from the historical predominance of one religion in a country and may reflect broad social scepticism about new or minority religions. At times it stems from the emergence of a country from a long period of Communist rule, in which all religion was prohibited or, at best, out of favour.

"In such countries, scepticism or even the fear of certain religions or all religions lingers within segments of society. In some cases, this circumstance has led to a curtailment of religious freedom."

The report went on to list the nine countries in the section – Belarus, Brunei, Eritrea, Indonesia, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Malaysia, Moldova Russia and Turkey.

It described Malaysia thus: "Islam is the official religion, although the constitution provides for freedom of religion. The Government considers adherence to Sunni Islam intrinsic to Malay ethnic identity; therefore, Sunni Islamic religious laws bind ethnic Malays, who represent approximately 55 percent of the population.

"The Government monitored the activities of the Shi'a minority and claimed the right to detain members of what it considers Islamic "deviant sects", that is, groups that do not follow the official Sunni teachings.

"The right to leave the Islamic faith and adhere to another religion remained controversial, and in practice it was very difficult for Muslims to change religions. Non-Muslim religious minorities generally worship freely although with some restrictions, such as construction of places of worship and new cemeteries."

Immediately after the Executive Summary was released, TV3 interviewed



The 1999 Emmanuel Celebration, a national evangelistic rally organised by NECF, was held in a public stadium – the Bukit Kiara National Stadium.

NECF Malaysia Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong for his views on Malaysia's position in the report. The interview was aired on the television station's 8pm and midnight news last Dec 19. Rev Wong said it was not fair and accurate to put Malaysia among the top nine countries that have discriminatory policies or legislations disadvantaging religions other than the official religions.

There is greater religious freedom in Malaysia compared with some countries in the Middle East and other parts of the world, he added and pointed out that in Malaysia, the people have the liberty to believe, practise, propagate and govern their faiths according to Article 11 of the Federal Constitution – the country's supreme laws.

They are also free to publicly carry out religious celebration and practices, he said, and in fact, the Government has been sponsoring national celebrations of religious festivals such as Christmas, for the past three years. Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had also sent out personally-signed Christmas cards to 1,500 churches during the 2003

Christmas season, Rev Wong said.

"We are free to organise religious meetings and evangelistic rallies at public places such as stadiums. Therefore the summary is not acceptable," he said at the interview.

Asked why the summary contained the distorted perception, Rev Wong said the writers could have been ignorant of the true situation in Malaysia, or could have been misinformed by people who did not understand the context we are living in.

Rev Wong said that people with the wrong perception of religious liberty in Malaysia should come and live in Malaysia to experience the true religious atmosphere and talk to the various religious leaders.

However, the full report on Malaysia (see next page) is fair and accurately reflects some of the restrictions faced by certain religions in the country, Rev Wong stressed at the interview.

He asked that the Government to look at the comments in the report and consider ways to resolve the issues highlighted.

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question, and in practice it is very difficult for Muslims to change religions legally. The legal process of conversion is unclear.

In 2001 a High Court judge rejected the application of a woman who argued that she had converted to Christianity and requested that the term "Islam" be removed from her identity card. The judge ruled that an ethnic Malay is defined by the Constitution as "a person who professes the religion of Islam."

(Muslims who wish to leave or have left Islam for another religion) would not face government punishment as long as they did not defame Islam after their conversion. Leaders of the opposition Islamic Party have stated that the penalty for apostasy should be death.

The Government opposes what it considers deviant interpretations of Islam, maintaining that the "deviant" groups' extreme views endanger national security. In the past, the Government imposed restrictions on certain Islamic groups, primarily the small number of Shi'a residents. The Government continues to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority.

The Government continues to significantly expand efforts to restrict the activities of the Islamic opposition party at mosques. Several states announced measures including banning opposition-affiliated imams from speaking at mosques, more vigorously enforcing existing restrictions on the content of sermons, replacing mosque leaders and governing committees thought to be sympathetic to the opposition, and threatening to close down unauthorized mosques with ties to the opposition.

The Government justified such measures as necessary to oppose the "politicisation of religion" by the opposition. In recent years, government officials and ruling party politicians have claimed that opposition Islamic party members were giving political sermons in mosques around the country.

Proselytising of Muslims by members of other religions is strictly prohibited, although proselytising of non-Muslims faces no obstacles. The Government discourages—and in practical terms forbids—the circulation in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible and distribution of Christian tapes and printed materials in Malay. However, Malay-language Christian materials are available.

Some states have laws that prohibit the use of Malay-language religious terms by Christians, but the authorities do not enforce them actively. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials faces few restrictions in East Malaysia.

In April the Government banned a Bible, written in the mother tongue of the indigenous Iban tribe in the East Malaysia state of Sarawak, on the grounds that the use of the phrase "Allah Taala" (Almighty God), a term widely used in Islamic literature, could create confusion among Muslims. However, by the end of April, the Acting Prime Minister lifted the ban following the addition of a cross to the cover of the Iban Bible, indicating to Muslims that the Bible is intended for Christians.

In recent years, visas for foreign clergy no longer have been restricted, and most visas were approved during the period covered by this report. While representatives of non-Muslim groups are no longer invited to sit on the immigration committee that approves such visa requests, the MCCBCHS is asked for its recommendation. Some non-Islamic groups complained that Christian proselytising campaigns sometimes were conducted in unethical ways and tended to result in heightened religious animosity within the communities in which they took place.

The Government generally restricts remarks or publications that might incite racial or religious disharmony. This includes some statements and publications critical of particular religions, especially Islam. The Government also restricts the content of sermons at mosques. Some state governments ban certain Muslim clergymen from delivering sermons.

The Government generally respects non-Muslims' right of worship; however, state governments carefully control the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries. Approvals for such permits sometimes are granted very slowly. Beginning in 2000, the Government stopped enforcing guidelines requiring the presence of at least 2,000 adherents of a particular non-Muslim faith in a locality for construction of a new non-Muslim place of worship to be approved.

However, resistance from local authorities continues, as no such requirement exists for Muslim places of worship. In addition, after years of complaints by non-Islamic religious organisations about the need for the State Islamic Council in each state to approve construction of non-Islamic religious institutions, the Minister of Housing and Local Government announced that such approval no longer would be required. However, it is not



Muslims who wish to convert from Islam face severe obstacles. Nor Aishah Bokhari (above pix) made national headlines in 1997 after she made a Statutory Declaration that she had embraced Catholicism, having renounced Islam. She subsequently went into hiding with her Chinese-Indian Catholic boyfriend after escaping from her family home where she alleged she was held against her will.

The judge also reaffirmed a 1999 High Court ruling that secular courts have no jurisdiction to hear applications by Muslims to change religions and stated that only an Islamic court has jurisdiction to rule on the woman's supposed renunciation of Islam and conversion to Christianity.

In August 2002, the Court of Appeals ruled that only the Islamic court is qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate. These rulings make conversion of Muslims nearly impossible in practice.

The issue of Muslim apostasy is very sensitive. In 1998 after a controversial incident of attempted conversion, the Government stated that apostates

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known whether this change always is reflected in state policies and local decisions. For example, in Shah Alam, for several years the Selangor state authorities have blocked the construction of a Catholic Church.

In family and religious matters, all Muslims are subject to Shari'a law. According to some women's rights activists, women are subject to discriminatory interpretations of Shari'a law and inconsistent application of the law from state to state.

In February 2002, the pro-opposition Council of Ulama submitted a memorandum to the Conference of Rulers urging action against six academics who had allegedly belittled the Prophet Mohammed and humiliated Islam in their writings. The Council of Rulers referred the memorandum to the National Council on Islamic Religious Affairs. No action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

State governments in Kelantan and Terengganu, which are controlled by the Islamic opposition party, made efforts to restrict Muslim women's dress. In Kelantan, a total of 120 Muslim women were fined between January and May 2002 for not adhering to the dress code. The Terengganu state government introduced a dress code in 2000 for government employees and workers on business premises.

Terengganu's executive councillor in charge of women's and non-Muslims' affairs claimed that the dress code was designed to protect the image of Muslim women and to promote Islam as a way of life.

One Muslim women's non-governmental organisation (NGO) criticised the requirement, stating that forced compliance with a state-mandated dress code is not consistent with the values of the Koran. According to an unconfirmed report, Muslim women previously had been fined in Kelantan for not wearing a head covering.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continues to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority, and the Government can detain members of

what it considers Islamic "deviant sects," i.e., groups that do not follow the official Sunni teachings, without trial or charge under the Internal Security Act (ISA). According to the Government, no individuals were detained under the ISA for religious reasons as of the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government is concerned that "deviationist" teachings could lead people astray and cause divisions among Muslims. Therefore, members of such groups can be arrested and detained, with the consent of the Shari'a (Islamic) court, in order to be "rehabilitated" and returned to the "true path of Islam." In May 2002, the Government revealed that the Malaysian Islamic Development Department has been able to "rehabilitate" hundreds of followers from 125 "deviationist" groups after they underwent "counseling" at a faith

"The Government generally respects non-Muslims' right of worship; however, state governments carefully control the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries."

rehabilitation center in the state of Negeri Sembilan.

In 2000 the Shari'a High Court in the state of Kelantan, which is controlled by the Islamic opposition party, sentenced four persons to three years in prison for disregarding a lower court order to recant their alleged heretical beliefs and "return to the true teachings of Islam." The High Court rejected their argument that Shari'a law has no jurisdiction over them because they had ceased to be Muslims. Dismissing their appeal, the Court of Appeal ruled in August 2002 that only the Shari'a court is qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed

to religious freedom.

The Government has a comprehensive system of preferences in the administration of housing, education, business, and other areas for ethnic Malay Muslims and a few other indigenous groups that practice various religions.

Ecumenical and interfaith organisations of the non-Muslim religions exist and include the MCCBCHS, the Malaysian Council of Churches, and the Christian Federation of Malaysia. Muslim organisations generally do not participate in ecumenical bodies. In May representatives from Muslim NGOs boycotted a workshop titled "Toward the Creation of an Inter-religious Council," organised by the Malaysian Bar Council, on grounds that such a council would have powers to endorse apostasy and could also pave the way for other religions to spread their teachings among Muslims.

During an international HIV/AIDS conference, also in May, a significant minority of Muslim participants, both local and international, accused a foreign, female Muslim academician

of blasphemy and demonising Islam for presenting a paper that reportedly stated a traditional Islamic theological approach could never cure the disease.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy representatives met and maintained an active dialog with leaders and representatives of various religious groups.

The Embassy also sponsored several major events to discuss these issues. One such seminar on "Islam and Human Rights," held in a state controlled by the Islamic opposition party, underscored the connection of human rights with indigenous values and highlighted the key human rights values all share.

Another conference on "Religious Pluralism in a Democratic Society" focused on the role of different religions, including Islam, in a changing American landscape and the shared challenges of multi-religious countries.

BM Church to Arrest Spiritual Decline Of Youths

MANY East Malaysian Christian youths from BM churches backslide once they go over to live in West Malaysia (WM) to study or work. Leaders of BM churches in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, met last December to brainstorm ways to arrest the spiritual decline, evident in the high dropout rate, coupled with reports of their involvement in drugs, alcoholism and other substance abuse.

Among the 12 present at the meeting were several leaders from WM, including NECF Malaysia BM Executive Secretary Alfred Tais. The meeting heard that once in WM, the youths have difficulty getting to church because most of the youths live in the university or college hostels, or hostels provided by their employers.

Many colleges also hold extra-curricular activities on Sundays, thus restricting the student youths from attending church services. Compounding these problems is the lack of information on the churches available to them.

Thus, even if they have the time and the transport, they do not know where to go. In short, they have no contact with churches and pastors who can minister to them. To resolve the

problems, the leaders agreed on several measures to take. Firstly, they will hold consultations with pastors of BM churches in Sabah and Sarawak to inform them of the problems their youths are facing in WM.

Many pastors, both in WM and East Malaysia (EM), apparently are unaware of the problems. The pastors will then be encouraged to identify their youths who are coming over to WM, and link them with the churches in the location they will be living in.

To assist the pastors, NECF will provide them with a list of BM churches in WM according to their regions. Once the contacts with the churches have been made, the youths' parents will be asked to write letters authorising the churches to visit and take their children out for their church activities. These letters will be presented to the appropriate



These youths from East Malaysia now live in Kuala Lumpur and attend the SIB KL BM Church. They have just finished their training at the church's leadership internship programme at Port Dickson last October.

authorities, such as college wardens or employers, to secure their cooperation.

On WM side, BM churches here will also meet to identify the colleges, universities and workplaces with high concentration of EM youths, and make greater efforts to locate them.

Finally, NECF will list out the specific problems faced by the various groups of EM youths – such as students, factory workers and supermarket workers – and circulate the information to all BM churches to raise awareness of the issues.

Moving the Chinese Church

CHINESE churches have responded enthusiastically to NECF Malaysia's efforts to strengthen the Chinese Church in Malaysia.

Since the start of the NECF Chinese ministry a year ago, NECF has visited Chinese churches throughout the country to inform them of the new ministry and conduct current issues seminars in Mandarin. (Before the ministry started, the on-going seminars were conducted in English and BM.)

Those who attended the talks commented that the presentations have given them insights into how events in the country affect their faith and their daily lives, what they, as Christians, can do, and how they can wisely pray for the issues at hand.

Many pastors and leaders have also expressed appreciation for the appointment of a staff for the ministry (Ms Ngeh Hoong Eng) as they now have a specific person to contact when they

require assistance, especially on matters relating to the government and authorities.

Some pastors of smaller independent churches said they can now get help for simple (but important) matters such as opening bank accounts for their churches. Comments like this have reminded the NECF staff to be more mindful of the needs of smaller churches, particularly those in the rural areas.

Another noticeable development among the Chinese churches since the start of the ministry is a greater realisation of the importance of unity in prayer – a result of last year's 40-day Merdeka Prayer and Fast programme where, for the first time, the Chinese churches were involved on a large scale.

To help them participate more meaningfully throughout the 40 days, NECF printed 20,000 prayer booklets in Chinese, and distributed them to some 320 Chinese congregations all over

Malaysia.

In conjunction with the Prayer and Fast, NECF also organised a separate Merdeka prayer rally for the Klang Valley Chinese churches. About 1,000 Christians turned up to pray for the country and listen to US-based Dr Ernest Chan, who also spoke at a prayer conference following the rally.

Dr Chan returned to Kuala Lumpur in November to speak at the NECF Chinese Pastors and Elders conference, which many said was a breakthrough for the Chinese Church as it was believed to be the first time leaders from the mainline and charismatic churches have gathered.

NECF also started a Chinese newsletter similar to the Berita NECF. Due to time constraint, only two issues were published last year. Hoong Eng hopes to publish four issues this year. For complimentary issues, please e-mail chinese@necf.org.my

That Will Not Be Burnt Up

MALAYSIA is probably the only Muslim country in the world where the government offers Bible knowledge (BK) as a subject in its Form 5 examination syllabus. In fact, on the front page of the SPM paper is stated "*Hak cipta kerajaan Malaysia*" (copyright of the Malaysian Government). But there was a time in the mid-1990s that the subject came close to being taken off the list because of the low number of candidates. Secondary school principal Moey Yoke Lai gives compelling reasons to take BK seriously, not just to keep it in the SPM examination syllabus, but as the "living Word of God that will never be burnt up in fire".

Christian students need to know God's Word as well, if not better, than their academic subjects. Far too many Christians strive for success and strain every nerve and muscle to reach university level in the academics but are content to leave their knowledge of the scriptures at Sunday School level. Some of them know their Sejarah (history) textbooks from cover to cover to ensure they score a distinction. They know their Science and Mathematics so well that they can rattle off complicated formulas without batting an eyelid. However, when it comes to the Bible, they are lost and unsure of what a verse is all about. To know God better, we need to know His Word.

Taking BK is an investment of time for eternity. Matt. 24:35 says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away." One day, the earth as we know it will be burnt up in fire, and all the science and mathematics associated with it will not be applicable anymore. But God's Word alone can give the sense of security that we need today so that our hearts will not faint because of fear.

If students will get to know more and more of the God of the Bible, they will stand secure in the knowledge that our God alone "owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine." How wonderful to know that "the hand that spill the stars all across the wide heavens" is the hand that holds our lives safe and secure in all circumstances.

BK will undergird the minds of our students and provide them with a moral compass that will guide all their actions and decisions in their everyday living. Today, young minds are bombarded with



"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

all the TV programmes. Astro, while opening wide the channels of information for us, have made available all kinds of shows with questionable values. Peer group pressure is very strong.

Many youths are left without adult supervision while both parents are out at work. Moral Education in school is largely taught by teachers of a different religious persuasion. The only

other subject that may teach principles for living is fast fading from our school curriculum (English Literature) and again it is largely taught by non-Christians. The study of BK will help our students make decisions that are based on biblical principles.

The Church of Malaysia needs strong leaders today and tomorrow. Christian leaders are grown not born. Our students need help to nurture their roots in the Christians faith in order to provide dynamic leadership in the future. If they will consciously decide to set aside time to study BK for SPM, they are

disciplining themselves to master the material in Luke and Acts and filling their minds with the knowledge of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the early church. As they do this week by week, they will saturate their minds with the thoughts of God and begin to think God's thoughts after Him. Taking BK is like having a part-time theological seminary brought into our own school.

Taking BK will help improve the students' command of the English language. Statistical studies have shown a correlation in this. English has become the

lingua franca of the world. Reading, discussion and written homework in English while studying BK gives invaluable practice in the language. Memorisation of certain passages will help the formation of language patterns

in the mind that will automatically enhance the mastery of the language.

Finally, taking BK is a testimony to our teachers, school administrators and government officials that our Christian faith means something to us. A quick look at the statistics of the number of SPM candidates for BK nationwide over the years will pose a challenge to us. In the 1960s, many thousands at Form 3 and 5 levels took the subject. The number started sliding until it reached an alarming figure of only 20 candidates in 1995.

"BK will undergird the minds of our students and provide them with a moral compass that will guide all their actions and decisions in their everyday living."

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Raising Boys to Be Real Men

"It is tougher to raise kids now than it was 30 or 40 years ago. When I was young, the culture helped parents reinforce responsible behaviour. There was a consensus of what was right and wrong. Today, however, the culture is moving away from those principles. Everyone suffers



as a result, but it is the children who suffer the most." – Dr James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family.

While children of both sexes are at risk as a result of the pace of living and rampant immorality, Dr Dobson believes that boys are more affected by these changes than girls. Boys are facing serious trouble in today's society.

"Boys are more rambunctious, more competitive, more likely to get into trouble and more likely to challenge the system," he says. "They need more supervision, more discipline and, most important, more time with their fathers."

Dr Dobson has produced a new VCD series to help parents who are raising boys. The 11-session *Bringing Up Boys* series cover essential areas such as affirming boys' masculinity, the impact of fathers on sons, special advice for single moms and much more. He presents anecdotes, statistics, the latest

medical research revealing the innate differences between boys and girls; practical, biblically-based advice on how parents can raise boys in a challenging environment; and a discussion of our culture's increasingly hostile attacks on the notion of masculinity. The single mother figures prominently in the messages as well.

The series is suited for a variety of settings, including Sunday school classes, neighbourhood and home study groups, private viewings by parents and grandparents, high school and college curricula, and parenting forums.

A special church curriculum set consisting of 11 VCDs, one *Bringing Up Boys* hardcopy textbook, one leaders guide and 10 participant guides is available at RM300.00 is available from Focus on the Family (e-mail benny@family.org.my or tel. 03-58823343).

New Members

We welcome the following into our Fellowship as **Ordinary Members**:

- **Antioch Revival Sanctuary, Negri Sembilan**, pastored by *S.A Peters/o Saverimuthu*
- **Church of Taiping** represented by *Elder Ooi Ah Kee*
- **Word of Life Centre, Ipoh**, pastored by *Rev Dr Daniel Velloo*
- **Hope of God, Kuantan**, pastored by *Simon Eng*
- **PJ Calvary Harvest Centre** pastored by *Denise Yong Pow Kim*
- **Church of the Bride, Seremban**, pastored by *Charles Batumalay a/l Kuppan*
- **Penang International Church** pastored by *Craig McKenzie*

We also welcome 25 individuals as **Associate Members**: Esther Tiong Swee Ying, Mary Kang, Pr Samuel Lau Pee Chai, Pr Philip Agong, Seow Dan Ping, Sandy Chuah Sean Bee, Tay Ti Mei, Rev Chong Hee Sing, Stefany Yeo Ah Hong, Tinkie Tan, Rev Leong Vui Chee, Chan Siew Leng, Ding Kong Leong, Brian Retna Kumar a/l Retnasamy, Thomas George, Derick Lam Kong Choong, Alex Tan Say Chye, Janice Tham May Sin, John Quah Beng Tiong, Sharon Ti Lien Heng, Pauline Lim Wen Tsai, Addy Cheah Kam Mun, Ho Cheng Leong, Elok Robert Tee and Minni Ang Kim Huai.

Olympic Sport of A Different Kind

THIS year, many of us (especially the youths) will be glued to our television sets to catch the 100th Olympic Games in Athens. Who will be the fastest and strongest? Who can jump the highest and farthest? Who will win the Bible quiz?

Hold on. What's the Bible to do with adrenaline-pumping sports? Well, some local Christian groups have teamed up to organise the Olympic Postal BK (Bible Knowledge) Quiz 2004.

Jointly organised by several Christian groups including Scripture Union, the Malaysian Christian Schools Council and Teachers Christian Fellowship, the quiz is open to all secondary school students. Schools which have Christian fellowships and church youth groups are encouraged to participate. The quiz will be conducted in three languages – Bahasa Malaysia, English and Chinese.

For further information, e-mail Mrs Kua at mk964@pc.jaring.my or phone Scripture Union at 03-77829592. For BK textbooks, teaching CDs and guide book, phone TCF at 03-56375623 or MCSC 03-79565310.

Now, this is one competition where everyone's a winner because all participants would have gained from reading His Word.

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: THAT WILL NEVER BE BURNT UP

Thereafter, with the concerted effort of the Teachers Christian Fellowship and the Malaysian Christian Schools Council, the number slowly climbed to 234 in 1999. Last year, less than 500 candidates sat for the paper.

Will Christian students, parents, teachers, church members rally round and help to restore the numbers to this subject as a testimony to our government that we want our young people to be well grounded in the Word of God?

May our churches play a leading role in this as we have always placed great emphasis on the study of God's Word so that every believer is well equipped to serve effectively.

Perhaps through this avenue, we will see restored to the churches a strong core of young men and women able to teach and preach God's Word and inspire the churches to grow dynamically and take the gospel to every corner of our country.



Kidbuilders Character-Building Seminar



THIS seminar will address the issue of declining morality and character deterioration in children worldwide, and what we – concerned parents and teachers – can do to reverse this trend.

The seminar will introduce the *Kidbuilders Character-Building* programme based on the *Life of Jesus*, which was developed by Dr V Gilbert

Beers, an accomplished author of more than 150 books out of which 100 are for children. Many of his books have appeared on the bestsellers list, including *Toddlers Bible* and the *One Year Bible for Children*. He also helped develop nine specialty Bibles including the *Life Application Bible*.

Dr Beers is listed on the Who's Who in America under the sections Writers, Biblical Studies and Archaeology, Men of Achievement and Contemporary Authors.

He will speak at the seminar together with his daughter, Kathleen J Cathey, and his grandson, Kevin Bradford Cathey. Kathleen is an accomplished musician and plays the cello with several symphony orchestras. She is currently an early childhood music instructor at the Community School of the Arts in Wheaton College. Kevin is currently on the High Gold Honour Roll at Wheaton North High School.

The seminar is jointly organised by NECF Malaysia, Glad Sounds, Scripture Union, Children at Risk Network and Focus on the Family Malaysia. It will be held in Malacca (Bethel Church) on Feb 27 and Kuala Lumpur (FGA KL) on Feb 28.

For enquiries, contact NECF at tel. 03-77278227 or e-mail enquiries @necf.org.my

1st National Prayer Consultation



THE NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission will hold its first national prayer consultation for prayer leaders and pastors from May 1 to 3. The consultation, a follow-up to last year's National Prayer Conference, aims to strengthen the prayer network in Malaysia.

At the stay-in consultation, invited representatives from all the 14 states will update participants on the prayer ministry in their respective states. Participants will also discuss the setting up of regional prayer commissions under the NECF Prayer Commission.

Following the consultation from May 4 to 5 is a prayer workshop conducted by Rev Dr Bradley Stuart. Contact Ann Low at the NECF office for further details.

NECF MALAYSIA PROPOSED CHURCH DEPUTATION SCHEDULE

NECF is planning to visit the following places subject to confirmation of the various pastors fellowships.

Feb 26 (Thurs.)	Ipoh (English) Pastors Fellowship Ipoh (Chinese) Pastors Fellowship
Mar 16 (Tues.)	Kuala Lumpur Pastors Fellowship
Mar 17 (Wed.)	Petaling Jaya Pastors Fellowship
Mar 19 (Fri.)	Penang Pastors Fellowship
Mar 20 (Sat.)	Alor Star / Taiping Pastors Fellowship
Mar 23 (Tues.)	Klang Pastors Fellowship
Mar 25 (Thurs.)	Subang Jaya Pastors Fellowship
Apr 6 (Tues.)	Malacca Pastors Fellowship
Apr 13 (Fri.)	Muar Pastors Fellowship Batu Pahat Pastors Fellowship
Apr 14 (Sat.)	Johor Bahru Pastors Fellowship

National Sports Ministry Conference

THE Malaysia Coalition of Sports Ministries and the NECF Malaysia Youth Commission are holding a conference aimed at mobilising local churches to establish and develop a sports ministry in the local churches. Through the conference, the organisers hope to network sportsmen, sports-related professionals, churches and missions who desire to impact their world through sports.

The two-day conference is a follow-up to the 1998 Commonwealth Games project where NECF mobilised churches to, among others, conduct sports clinics, distribute sports-related evangelistic materials, and organise youth conferences throughout the country.

The speakers are Paul Moses from India and Lyn MacKay from Australia. Paul is attached to Global Network Partner of Church Sports International as the Sports Ministry Facilitator for the Central India/Sri Lanka and the Maldives regions. He has been involved in the sports ministry for the past 17 years.

Lyn, a partner with Church Sports International, has been involved in training, consulting and mentoring in Sports Ministry for the past 10 years. For most of her life, she was ministering through recreational sport as a teacher, coach and player. Among the topics that will be addressed are Biblical foundation for sports ministry; What is being done around the world; Transforming communities; and Establishing partnerships.

The conference will be held at Heritage Centre, Petaling Jaya, on February 13 and 14. For more information, contact John Yip at tel. 03-78801130; mobile 012-2785144; e-mail ac_sports@hotmail.com

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

PAPUA

UNDER Indonesian rule since 1963, Papua (Irian Jaya) is now teetering on the brink of serious conflict. The indigenous Papuans are Melanesian and predominantly Christian. They long for self-determination and freedom from oppression. In 2001, the Indonesian government granted them autonomy. However, the government has reneged and now the Papuan people are facing a future of Islamic domination.

The Indonesian military is becoming increasingly provocative, looking for grounds to launch a military assault to eradicate the Papuan people. Since East Timor gained independence, Papua has seen an influx of pro-Indonesia militias and Islamist militant groups such as the Laskar Jihad.

Christian leaders in Papua fear that an ethnic cleansing could be imminent.

Pray: for this situation to be exposed widely, and for international pressure on the Indonesian government to guarantee security, human rights and freedom in Papua; for great spiritual wisdom and courage for Papua's Christian leaders and pastors, who are a respected voice in Papua. May they be able to keep the Papuan people calm and focused at this tense and frightening time; and for God to overrule and reverse the situation.

RUSSIA

THERE are about 42 million families in Russia, over 24 million of them with children. But only in two million families is the income of one working person higher than the living standard (minimum wage). State support is very small.

The difficult economic situation and very liberal laws have fuelled the growth of sexual exploitation of children. According to specialists, 50,000 children aged between three and 14 in Moscow alone are engaged in sexual business.

Pray for the government to take action to end this exploitation. Meanwhile, Compassion Ministry in Moscow, supported by UK-based Eurovangelism, helps desperately needy children. It runs two shelters and a special home for youngsters with AIDS. Pray for this and other such ministry.

EGYPT

THE latest report from the Barnabas Fund confirms that Marian Girgis Makar, a 30-year-old convert to Christianity, was freed after nearly two months of torture and interrogation. Her husband, who was released earlier, said he and his wife were interrogated and beaten while in custody and that she was tortured more than he was. One convert, Issam Abdul Fathre, died recently while being transferred from a police station to the hospital. Praise God for the release of Marian Makar. Pray that Christians in Egypt will continue to courageously and joyfully spread the Good News among their Muslim friends and neighbours.

TURKMENISTAN

TURKMENISTAN is a majority Muslim, former Soviet, Central Asian nation. The president, Saparmurat Niyazov, is a totalitarian nationalist dictator who rules with Soviet-style oppression. Only 2.6 per cent of the population are Christian, mostly Russian Orthodox. All religious groups must register with the government, but to do so they must have 500 adult members in a given location.

This makes registration impossible for all but Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox. From Nov 10, 2003, a new religion law has made any unregistered religious activity illegal. In past years evangelicals have suffered threats, harassment, fines, beatings, detention, torture and exile. Now they also face criminal charges and imprisonment.

Please pray: for God to change this dreadful situation either through a change of leader or the transformation of President Niyazov; for God to protect His children as they meet together "illegally".

SAUDI ARABIA

TWO Coptic Christians jailed by Saudi authorities have been released 17 days after their arrest for establishing an expatriate house church in the capital of Riyadh. They were released by specific orders of Prince Sultan who is the Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Saudi Arabia strictly forbids Christians and other non-Muslims to meet for public worship, but members

of the royal family insist that non-Muslims are free to worship privately within their own homes.

Give thanks to God for the release of these men, and ask Him to bless Prince Sultan, who ordered their release, with the peace only Jesus can give. Pray this decision will make it possible for Saudi believers to meet in private homes without fear.

BOSNIA

THOUGH the war in Bosnia ended in 1995, people are still suffering from its legacy. Many still live in refugee camps because their homes were destroyed or are now occupied by other refugee families. In some areas, as much as 90 per cent are unemployed and a lot of people are dependent on soup kitchens for food. In the midst of Bosnia's turmoil is a tiny evangelical Church estimated at no more than believers out of four million.

Bosnia is one of the least evangelised countries in Europe. But one of the amazing things God is doing through the Church is bringing Serb, Muslim and Croat communities together. Hatred is being replaced by love for one another through coming to know Jesus personally.

Pray for the country, for the small Church to remain faithful, and for the work of reconciliation.

PHILIPPINES

CHRISTIAN workers travel through treacherous waters frequented by pirates and rebels to share the gospel with the Sangil people of the Philippines. These workers live in isolated villages, ministering through community development projects and telling Bible stories. Pray for the Lord to draw the Sangil people to himself – and protect His messengers.

NIGERIA

"WE are begging you, the people of the world, help us pray that God will cast all these things away," said a Nigerian Christian who has suffered at the hands of Muslim extremists. He speaks on behalf of many Christians in the land who struggle against persecution, violence and destruction of their homes and churches. Pray for our brethren in Nigeria.