



Preserving Inter-Religious Relations: Analysing Singapore's 3S Framework

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SYNOPSIS

A 61-year-old Singaporean Chinese man was recently arrested and charged for his suspected involvement in sending a parcel containing pork with a note "halal Babi chop" to a mosque with deliberate intent to wound racial and religious feelings. This commentary analyses the utility of the 3S (Safety, Security and Sensitivity) framework of interfaith relations as a safety net in Singapore's multi-religious society.

COMMENTARY

A 61-year-old Singaporean, Bill Tan Keng Hwee, was recently arrested and charged in court for allegedly mailing an envelope [containing a piece of pork and an offensive note](#), with "halal Babi chop" (translated as "lawful" pork chop) written on it, to the Al-Istiqamah Mosque in Serangoon North, Singapore, with deliberate intent to wound racial feelings.

Preliminary investigations revealed that this was not an isolated case involving Tan, an operations support staff at a local institution, as he was also allegedly [involved in several similar cases](#) at other mosques across the island.



The Al-Istiqamah Mosque (Photo credit: CNA/Marcus Mark Ramos)

Regrettably, there have also been other cases. In April 2024, a 30-year-old food delivery rider was sentenced to [12 weeks' jail for stealing two cans of pork](#) from a supermarket and placing them at the entrance of the Al-Ansar Mosque in Bedok to provoke anger within Singapore's Muslim community. Regardless of their motives, the two culprits have jeopardised Singapore's social fabric and religious harmony.

This commentary analyses the effectiveness of Singapore's 3S (Safety, Security, and Sensitivity) safety net framework in dealing with racially or religiously inflammatory events. The hostile and inflammatory act in these incidents violated the safety, security and sensitivity framework, threatening to create distrust that could divide society.

Safety of the Community

The incident at the Al-Istiqamah Mosque prompted the activation of the Singapore Civil Defence Force, and [staff and worshippers were evacuated](#) from the building as a precautionary measure for their safety. Fortunately, after an inspection by hazardous materials specialists, no dangerous substances, such as explosives, were found. A woman was taken to Sengkang General Hospital for breathlessness, but this was considered a separate case.

This irresponsible act has caused alarm, instilled fear in the targeted community, and disregarded the grave consequences that could have occurred had the community overreacted. Additionally, a significant amount of time, effort, and resources had been diverted to ensure that the incident did not compromise the safety and well-being of the community.

Security of Places of Worship

Places of worship, including mosques, temples, and churches, are sacred and must be respected and protected. In the aftermath of the mosque incidents, measures have been taken to enhance their security, providing safe premises where staff and

worshippers can have peace of mind during their devotional practices. This assurance of security cannot be compromised, as failure in this respect could [intensify distrust and create divisions](#) between communities.

Singapore's Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, K. Shanmugam, described the recent incident as inflammatory and warned, "[This is playing with fire](#)".

As the Singapore government is determined to protect places of worship, it has established the Crisis Preparedness for Religious Organisations (CPRO) initiative, which aims to strengthen the capacity of religious organisations to safeguard their premises and congregants, as well as to assist others in their community during a crisis. To augment the plans, security personnel and staff in places of worship are trained to safeguard their premises.

Sensitivity Amongst Religious Groups

The action taken by Tan Keng Hwee seemed intended to be both hostile and [inflammatory](#), as pork, in Islamic jurisprudence, is *haram*, i.e., impermissible for Muslims to consume. Besides sparking deep concern within the community, the incident drew condemnation from [various religious groups](#) who expressed solidarity with the Muslim community. This included the [Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore](#), the Sikh Advisory Board, the Singapore Buddhist Federation, and the Taoist Federation (Singapore).

The demonstration of unity and mutual support reflects maturity and calmness amongst the religious elders in addressing sensitive interfaith issues. It is imperative that everyone of all races and faiths follow their lead, as well as respect each other's space and not transgress into sensitive turf that will create division, hatred and disrupt the peace between the communities.

Going Forward

The 3S framework of interfaith relations – Safety, Security, and Sensitivity – offers an important assurance of policy and practice for Singapore's multi-religious landscape and a viable path to sustaining religious harmony and peace.

Since Independence, Singapore's leaders have emphasised "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion", as a cornerstone for maintaining social harmony in the country. Singaporeans must never take for granted the hard-won peace and social harmony that have been attained. Every Singaporean has a crucial role to play in preserving this harmony and cohesion in society.

Although Singapore enjoys progress and prosperity, its [social fabric and religious harmony remain fragile](#). In an open and vibrant society, any misconduct – whether physical, written or spoken – that endangers the safety of any religious community, will threaten the security of places of worship, or undermine religious sensitivities in Singapore. It can tear apart the country's delicate social fabric and disrupt religious harmony.

Therefore, special attention and deliberate efforts must be put in place by the government, relevant authorities and interfaith organisations to maintain religious harmony. Individual behaviour and community responsibility require maturity and calmness when addressing cross-cultural and interreligious challenges.

This recent case is a testament to the prompt and appropriate level of responses by the government, the relevant authorities, and the maturity of the community involved, thus avoiding any undesirable escalation of the incident. As Singapore celebrates its 60th anniversary of nationhood, the whole of society must come together to strengthen and build upon the foundation of the country's cohesive social harmony.

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