



*By Nandakumar Haridas*

I went to the Masjid Negara today.

I do not wish to delve much on the demonstration itself. The demo, when I was there in the mosque compound, was almost over. It was a short one, as reported by the media.

I was there much earlier. Some tourists were walking and taking pictures, stalls were being set up waiting for customers who'd be visiting after their prayers. When the prayers were done, people started to leave and walk out of the mosque. Many headed to the stalls to have lunch and quite a number went to their vehicles to get back to their day's activities.

There were people's voices all about. One, in particular, stuck with me.

'Tuhan pun nak politikkan ke? Apa dah?'

I walked up to Affendi. He was holding his camera and sitting in front of the mosque compound. Understandably, he declined being photographed. We spoke.

I asked if he knew about the attacks on the churches. He looked surprised. Apparently the news hadn't reached him.

Affendi was angry and sad on learning more about the incidents. And while humbly admitting his knowledge may not be deep, stated that from the days of the Prophet, these actions were clearly not right.

His reaction showed me there is still reason to believe in this project of ours, this project called Malaysia.

We spoke quite a bit there in front of the mosque compound, with tourists snapping pictures and the remaining demonstrators clamoring for the waning media attention.

I left after that.

Even as I'm writing this, civil society groups are working feverishly in order to bring reason and sanity to our spaces which have been tarred with hypocritical elements.

Now Affendi and the other voices I overheard may not be reflective of everyone, but the very existence of these people tell me that this project, which is under severe attack at this time, is one I can still believe steadfastly. That's what I took back with me, and that's what I hope would

be taken to heart by all of us.

Believe instead.