

FAKE NEWS & LACK OF FAITH

The recently-passed 2018 Anti-Fake News Act 803 has been criticised left, right and centre. Many have claimed it would not only restrict the citizens' rights to freedom of speech, but worse, it has been said to stifle freedom of thinking. This is because the punishment meted out upon conviction is a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand ringgit or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six years or to both is said to be draconian in nature. People would be subjected to psychological censorship for fear of harsh repercussions just for sharing information.

Yet, in essence, the Act was passed as a result of rampant unverified and false news and information circulated and forwarded by public communities at large. According to the Act, "fake news" includes "any news, information, data and reports, which is or are wholly or partly false, whether in the form of features, visuals or audio recordings or in any other form capable of suggesting words or ideas".

As the term denotes, "fake news" is devoid of truth from its reality. It is an invention, creation, manipulation from non-existence into news, information or data which do not correspond to the truth on the ground and reality. Fake news could be in the form of exaggerations until it loses its truth and reality, or a mix of truth and falsehood or completely devoid of truth.

Interestingly, the person who is said to have used the term "fake news" and made it popular and widely used now is none other than the current US President, Donald Trump. Trump is reported to have used the term more than 66 times in his Twitter feed within a short span of time which became eventually voted as the most popular term for 2017.

In this age of the internet and social media where just about

anyone can be a publisher and author, news and information can be spread easily in a split second by a mere tap on the keyboard. The upside to it is its speed in real time and thus information can be relayed fast, but the downside is it lacks responsibility on the part of the senders. By simply clicking “share” or “forward” buttons, the unverified information is spread over the globe fast and easy.

In Islam, men are taught to verify truth not only about matters in life, but more so to truth and validity about the religious beliefs they themselves hold so as not to blindly follow their forefathers or ancestors. In a celebrated work of faith in Islam titled *al-Aqa'id al-Nasafi*, Imam al-Taftazani (d.1390) states that one of the sources of knowledge is true reports (*khobar al-sadiq*), whose definitions, being one of which is that, there is no possibility that people (having in mind of their different locations, places and time) could gather together to form a lie on the news.

Fundamentally, part of the Islamic teachings as spread by the Prophet's hadiths (sayings) is based on sound, authentic and verified chains of transmission reports from its first revelation since the first generation of Islam, as recorded in the history. Hence, the veracity of the hadiths are ensured by the integrity of its narrators.

Thus in Islam, the issue about the veracity of any information and news, as practised in the transmission of hadiths, is highly crucial and important as it relates to everything in life; from religious conviction to the mundane and temporal world issues. For true Muslims and believers, the act of lying, deceit, made-up stories, slander, fabrications of falsehood and the like are categorically prohibited and cursed by Allah in the Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Nur verse 7:

“... the curse of Allah be upon him, if he should be among the liars”...

Indeed, there are many more Qur'anic verses as well as Prophetic traditions on similar prohibitions. In spite of this, then why are there still Muslims involved in churning out fake news? The answer is simple: Lack of Iman (faith)! Men of strong faith will never fabricate news or spread fake news, and Muslims who persist in it in reality are without iman and only a Muslim in name. Just as the case of Muslims involved in bribery, and other criminal and immoral activities such as prostitution, it does not at all reflect Islam's approval of such acts. On the contrary, it merely shows that Islam is not practised and lived fully by such people.

In spreading fake news, generally at least two types of people are involved. The first is the active doers or fabricators of the fake news. Such people should heed Islamic teachings so that they are not subjected to the curse from Allah as mentioned in verse 7 of Surah al-Nur. Secondly, the innocent "forwarders" or "sharers" who merely forward and share whatever news that come their way and they proudly want to be "the first to know and spread the news", then such people should be reminded that they would be considered as accomplices in the act and they should be wary of the Quranic verse when Allah intones in Surah al-Hujurat 49, verse 6:

"When a liar (fasiq) comes to you with any news, verify it lest you should harm people in ignorance and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done".

In conclusion, you don't really need Anti-Fake News Act or any laws for that matter, if you are a truly practising Muslim and Believer, for you know Allah forbids spreading lies and fake news. The General Election is indeed around the corner, so verify any news and information you receive before sharing them with others. Happy voting!

The article was also published on [IKIM website](#):