

The Illusion of Independence: Colonial Legacy and the Struggle for True Liberation

News:

Malaysia celebrates its 'Independence Day' (31st August) under the theme "Malaysia Madani: Rakyat Disantuni." (Civil Malaysia: Compassion for the People). Yet questions remain: has independence delivered the desired liberation and justice, or are colonial legacies still shaping our society, economy, and politics?

Comment:

Since 1957, Malaysia has advanced in many fields. But independence cannot mean only political sovereignty and material advancement. Colonialism, especially under the British, left deeper marks: secularism, liberalism, and nationalism became embedded in institutions and thought. These legacies persist in guiding the nation's trajectory, though largely to its detriment. Western cultural imports eroded traditional values. Family bonds weakened, divorce and mental health problems rose, and youth struggle with toxic social media and cancel culture. Bullying in schools and alcohol-related tragedies persist, while moral decline threatens society's cohesion.

Capitalism entrenched by colonialism dominates Malaysia's economy. Populist policies create long-term burdens, national and household debts climb, and interest-based systems prevail under Islamic branding. GDP growth hides declining purchasing power and widening inequality. The rich thrive while ordinary citizens face high living costs, unemployment, and unaffordable housing. Currency volatility tied to the U.S. dollar exposes Malaysia to global manipulation. Meanwhile, British secular and liberal governance models left behind systems prone to oligarchy, corruption, and cronyism. Politics often serves party interests over people, with short-term populism displacing national vision. Institutions remain vulnerable to interference, while Islamic principles—capable of ensuring justice—are neglected.

Colonial "divide and rule" have certainly fragmented the Muslim ummah. Nationalism replaced unity, leaving the Muslim world weak and vulnerable. Today, oppression in Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, Xinjiang, and Sudan illustrates this weakness. International bodies like OIC and ASEAN have failed to defend Muslim dignity, showing the absence of effective leadership and solidarity.

Rethinking Independence

Malaysia's sovereignty is undermined by almost total reliance on Western systems. Their promises of justice and prosperity ring hollow. True liberation requires adopting Islam as a complete framework. Rab'i bin 'Amir's words to Rustum remain timeless: "Allah has sent us to free mankind from servitude to one another, to servitude to Allah; from the narrowness of this world to its vastness; from injustice to the justice of Islam."

Justice and welfare require full implementation of divine law under the Khilafah, where true justice and prosperity can be realized. Past scholars of the Malay world such as Sheikh Ahmad al-Fathani raised this awareness, linking independence struggles with defending Islamic unity. Their lessons endure: physical independence without spiritual and intellectual liberation is an illusion.

The so called Malaysian Independence Day should be filled with reflection. Colonial legacies—social erosion, capitalist entrapment, political corruption, and Muslim disunity—still shape Malaysia. Real independence demands rejecting these illusions and restoring Islam's holistic governance. Only through unity and the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate) can sovereignty be genuine, liberating body, mind, and soul from the shadow of colonial rule.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Dr. Mohammad – Malaysia