

Unification of Muslims in Malaysia and the Whole World Must Not Be Drawn on Racial Lines

News:

Ever since Pakatan Harapan (PH) took over the government, there has been a perception that the political position and privileges of the Malays have been eroded. Such perception began to develop among some Malays after they have witnessed several issues and incidents that saw the status quo of the Muslim-Malays being disturbed. This sentiment is also played out by the opposition to gain the support of the Malays who make up the majority in the country. In fact, lately, various strategies and efforts are being pursued to further the perception that the PH government is continuously under pressure from parties that are hostile to Islam. This perception is clearly reinforced when a number of recent government statements and decisions are seen as violations of Malay rights and are not in favour of Islam. Due to this development, there have been calls for unity under the Malay-Muslim slogan to defend the privileges of the Malays that is seen to be increasingly threatened in the New Malaysia era. This consequently resulted in a political coalition involving two major political parties representing the Malay-Muslims in the country, UMNO and PAS.

Comment:

The close cooperation between UMNO and PAS is seen to be influenced the series of by-elections held after the 14th General Election. At the same time, Malay-Muslim unification and unity efforts have also received the support of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that struggle to maintain Malay and Islamic interests in accordance to the principles laid out in the Federal Constitution. This is seen to be a positive development by some parties as a strong effort to ensure that the rights and privileges of the Malays and Muslims are upheld and protected.

Although the slogan of Malay-Muslim unity is at face value seem to be 'pure', as a Muslim, there are some issues that need to be addressed. One of the key questions concerns the purpose of this unification and struggle. Is this nationalistic struggle in line with the demands of Islam as a universal way of life without distinguishing the skin colour? What is the guarantee that the Islamic position will be fully preserved and Islam will be fully implemented through the unification effort under this Malay-Muslim slogan? Or is this unification just an alliance of convenience? It should also be noted that such development does have the potential to disrupt social cohesion and drag the country into racial polarization. It also opens the door to racial sentiments that will undermine religious values and nourish racial politics.

If one delves deeper into the characteristics of this alliance, one will observe that the unification is in fact based on the bond of nationalism that emerges when the instinct of self-defense (gharizah al-baqa') is strengthened due to external factors. Emergence of this instinct revives the passion for dominance and supremacy. As the level of awareness expands, this desire for dominance grows until it encompasses the

desire to see the group of people that shares the same language and culture to be in power. This will then manifest the desire to rule over other nations – solely based on the bonding which rests on nationalism. Even though the sense of ‘religious unity’ does play a role in the unification, it would be easily side lined as the real basis upon which the alliance is based on is nationalism and not religion. When unification based on this instinct is viewed as the basis of bonding, then what emerges is conflict and instability. Such a bond is not compatible with human dignity as it always creates a variety of internal conflicts. This is the case not only in this country, but also the whole Muslim world, which is broken up by nationalistic borders where each country is only thinking about its own survival, even though Islam is the shared religion amongst them.

Mixing Islamic slogans with racial sentiments not only contradicts Islamic values, but can also create negative perceptions that prevent others from approaching Islam. This racial based struggle also has the tendency to deny the rights of other people, whereas in Islam, the rights of every citizen must be fulfilled in accordance to what has been set out in Islamic Shariah, rather than based on the rights of a particular race. In addition, Malaysia’s history also shows that the previous government, which had ruled for more than six decades, are Muslims by majority, led by Malay-Muslim Prime Ministers and was dominated by a Malay-Muslim (UMNO) party; but has Islam been put in place and its laws fully enforced? Clearly, the argument pertaining to the strengthening and unification of Malay-Muslims on the basis of nationalism, that it strengthens and upholds Islam, is ludicrous. It does not make any difference if the government today, that does not adopt Islam, is replaced by the government and previous leaders who had clearly failed to uphold Islam when they were in power. This is because if the system in practice remains unchanged, Islamic law will never be allowed to be implemented, because the application of any Islamic rule will be subjected to constitutional provisions. In reality, it is most unfortunate that it is the Muslims themselves who have allowed the Islamic position to be threatened, thus opening the door of misunderstanding and conflict as they chose to remain in this democratic system and continue to feed it.

Islam is a universal ideology that is passed down to the whole human race, while the Malay-Muslims in this country form a part of the larger family of Muslims worldwide. The Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia should not narrow the political struggle within the racial based lines which honour the false frontiers set by the past colonial powers. Instead, we should understand that only the true Islamic struggle which is free from any racial framework that is capable of shaping the unity of thoughts and feelings among the Malays. We urge those who sincerely desire to fight for the unification of Muslims, to struggle for the unity of Muslims worldwide under the auspices of the Khilafah Rashid (righteous Caliph) in the way of the Prophet (saw).

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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