

Islam Hadhari – from the non-Muslim perspective¹

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Abstrak

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi presided as the Prime Minister on October 31, 2003; a smooth process of political exchange and transition for 16 months from former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, a statesman who had stood at the helm of the government for almost 22 years. After taking over the administration, Datuk Seri Abdullah introduced a few new agendas to show there are changes in continuity of national leadership including Islam Hadhari. In the context of multi-ethnic society, this policy is introduced to make the Muslim understand how progress is a part of Islam which includes modernity and values substance. At the same time, Islam Hadhari is also an approach which does not discriminate against the non-Muslim. There are ten principles put forward by the Prime Minister which the community must demonstrate so that development and modernization of the country are enjoyed and the fulfillment of livelihood and demands of their religions are carried on smoothly. This article examines Islam Hadhari from the non-Muslim perspective which includes the role and contributions of the community in order to ensure success of this agenda.

Introduction

Malaysia presents what may be named as a multi-ethnic nation, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. From the aspect of religion, the Malays profess Islam while the Chinese profess various religions and beliefs like Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Confucianism. The Indians though of various quarters, majority of them are Hindus. In this diverse environment, what is the role of the non-Muslim communities to realize the National Development and why are those responsibilities important to safeguard peace and prosperity of the Malaysian community in general? And, at the same time, how could they play their role within the context of Islam Hadhari which is the paramount policy in National Development today, under the premiership of Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The term has become increasingly popular ever since he took the helm of the nation. The non-Muslims may think it does not concern them since they are not adherents of Islam, but it is crucial for non-Muslims in Malaysia to grasp the concept. The Prime Minister needs full support towards this responsibility of building a civilization of excellence which is a continuation of past history, and at the same time to possess honorable character and personality.

Development based on good governance and the creation of a progressive community is the paradigm introduced by the Prime Minister by which Islam is to be seen within the context of

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multi-racial community facing the present epoch – ‘It is neither an approach to apologize for the perceived Islamic threat, nor an approach to seek approval from the non-Muslims for a more friendly and gentle image of Islam. It is an approach that seeks to make Muslims understand that progress is enjoined by Islam. It is an approach that is compatible with modernity and yet firmly rooted in the noble values and injunctions of Islam. It is an approach that values substance and not form’.

Taking into account the sensitivity of the non-Muslim communities on the process of Islamization of Malaysia, Abdullah ensures emphasis on the vision of Islamization by placing greater focus on Islamic values and building of noble characters and economy as the foundation for the formation of Islamic nation. This gives positive ness to the non-Muslim communities and strengthens support for the government. Islam Hadhari is understood not to be a new religion, or a sect but an attempt to make the followers of Islam to return to the fundamental teachings of the Quran and its practices. There are some who assume this to be a continuation of promoting Islamic values initiated by Tun Dr. Mahathir and there are also people who assume this to be a reaction to a certain political party which is tied to the issue of Islamic nation; while there are also who assume this to be a new dilemma as to how Islam Hadhari could help in the formation of an Islamic nation. There are even people who assume how Islam Hadhari would be able to bring closer the non-Muslim communities, for even among the Muslims themselves they are confused with different understanding of Islam Hadhari as there are varying interpretations.

Despite of this situation, the non-Muslim communities are comfortable with the assurances made by Abdullah that this approach is appropriate with changing time. He does not persuade the non-Muslim communities to accept as a matter of duty but as an integration which would bring together humanitarian attitudes within the context of multi-ethnic community. Islamic values have already been advanced all these while in administrations and non-Muslims have enjoyed the services satisfactorily till today.

Early history in the process of development in a multi-racial community

Leadership is a responsibility entrusted upon man for the prosperity of the world. Leadership begins at home and later at school, workplace, and political parties and in government. Leaders are responsible to their followers but there are those who assume that every individual is a leader and every leader is responsible to his citizens. This responsibility is a trust to ensure the rights and lives of the citizens are protected. If this responsibility is ignored, it can bring destruction to the community. Leadership has its followers and it is the responsibility of the citizens to be loyal to the chosen leader. As everything done by a leader is to uplift the citizens, it is normal for the leaders to ask for undivided loyalty from its followers because the leaders draw out policies and manage the governmental structures. Loyalty ensures good relationship and strengthens ties between leaders and followers. Leaders should be just and ensure responsibilities are entrusted for noble achievement and not for personal gains. In this context, there are those who question the relevance of religion in national development. Of the answer is in the positive, how would the acceptance of the non-Muslim communities be and what would their responsibilities be in realizing together national directions.

Islam is declared as the official religion of Malaysia under Para 3 of the Malaysian Constitution. This directly makes Malaysia an Islamic state and all leaders always ensure religious values are given consideration in the process of National Development. Although Islam is the official religion, recognition is also given to other religions and beliefs within the framework of the laws and the Constitution. The role of religion is important in creating

mutual understanding between the communities, so Islam has never denied the practices of other religions and has never forced its religion upon other ethnic groups. Based on this understanding, promoting Islamic values and the introduction of Islam Hadhari is not to be taken as forcing Islamic ideologies upon the non-Muslims but for them to accept it as a reality where majority of the citizens are Muslims and Islam seems to be the normal mould of culture for Malaysians in general. Because of this, the non-Muslim communities are not influenced by the wrong practice given of Islam by some quarters as political stability, racial harmony; practice and freedom are protected under a Malay leader, professing Islam. Each respects the diversities that exist and accepts the position of Malaysia as an Islamic state while tied down to the complexities of multi-ethnic and religions. Since the time of Independence until today, the government has done great effort to ensure harmony between various ethnic groups is maintained. Though we have experienced a few racial disturbances, of which May 13, 1969 was the worst, Malaysia is successful in avoiding total non-integration and has enhanced national stability through mutual understanding and cooperation. This happens in honoring the Malaysian Constitution.

There are events which we must see in the context of early history of national development. Among these was the communist threat which aroused fear and ethnic enmity in this country especially with the Chinese community. This threat was fully overcome after signing of peace agreement between the government and the Communist Party of Malaya on December 2, 1989. Separation of Singapore from Malaysia and confrontation with Indonesia are two important events that affected ethnic ties and national development at that time. However, the May 13 disturbances came about due to non-balance of ethnic relations in this country. The government was forced to declare emergency, dissolve Parliament and form the National Operation Council (NOC) to function as the government, to enhance a better structured government and harmony among the Malaysian communities.

It is clear that without solidarity among the various ethnic groups of Malaysia, it is difficult to perpetuate stability and without proper understanding it is difficult to provide opportunities to develop limited resources in the process of modernization. Among the effects of May 13 was the formation of 'Rukun Negara' so that the solidarity amongst the communities could be continued and Islam remains the official religion of the country. Belief in God is the chief tenet in 'Rukun Negara'. It promotes belief in ones own religion with Islam as the official religion and freedom to practicing ones own religion, as enshrined in the Constitution. It is also a policy of social contract that exists amongst the Malaysian citizen until today.

To ensure social stability and solidarity, a few strategies have been taken to correct social and economic imbalances. They are aimed at eradication of poverty, also of literacy and economic backwardness so that all together will support to achieve national development. The New Economic Policy (NEP) and the National Development Policy (NDP) are catalyst in increasing of standard of living, national earning, opportunities for education and economy. All these efforts by the government ensure increased stability, peace and cooperation amongst the communities. Realizing this reality which aims at peace and prosperity of the Malaysian community, the non-Muslim communities have also responsibilities to preserve harmony, for peace and absence of threat ensure national development. Even though it is not denied there are crises and economic upheavals, the situations are under control for steps are taken immediately to continue the agendas of change and stability. Currently, it is clear that the effects of modernization influence human elements, especially in social issues as we still are in possession of high human values that characterizes the community, religion is often used as an apparatus to balance the effects of changing time.

Islam Hadhari and the non-Muslim communities

Islam Hadhari is one of the agendas initiated by Abdullah after he took over the leadership of the nation in October 2003 and later having given detailed clarification at two different gatherings, i.e at the 55th UMNO General Assembly on September 2004 and at *Amanat Presiden* in February 2005. This appears to be a follow-up of enhancing Islamic values in 1980s and also appears to be the continuity of the history of civilization and glory of Islam itself. There are people who dispute Islam Hadhari as to how hard Tun Dr. Mahathir absorbed and established Islamic values unseen to generate a progressive community and excellent individuals through Islamization policy in his administration. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail at the opening ceremony of national level Prophet Muhammad's birthday said, "this program is important to create individuals and Muslim community which is better civilized in accordance to the demands of Islam by balanced approaches through spirituals, economic, education, society, law and the likes". In a phrase, it is 'progressive Islam'.

Islam Hadhari gives importance to excellence in living, enabling Malaysia to be a model Islamic state with its community which is progress-oriented, specialty, intellectual, highly skilled, nobility, and well-disciplined. In fact, all the principles of Islam Hadhari are characterized for preparation for change towards a dynamic and progressive society. Work is seen as a calling, and emphasis is placed on diligence and mastery of knowledge. It is a new approach to Islam that seeks to balance man's responsibility in the here and the hereafter (this life and the next). Having said this, Islam Hadhari's objectives are to restore civilization, excellence and achievements of Islam as before which is continuity into the present change of time and environment. The glorious Islamic civilization of the past serves as a reference point for this endeavour. It is also hoped that Malaysia will rise as a model Islamic nation that will then lead other Islamic nations to become competitive global players. Upholding of this is in line with Malaysia's position as Chairman of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). If studied properly, Islam Hadhari can thwart the current misinterpretation that Islam is a violent religion. The assimilation of Islam Hadhari takes into account the wants of a multi-racial community in this country even though absorption of Islamic values is given importance. It stresses the development of mind, body and soul, it does not threaten interaction and mutual respect between the races.

All these values are disseminated in Islam Hadhari which fulfill the demands of the global community, not only the Islamic community. Islam Hadhari can be seen through the positive angle for it does not discriminate against the non-Muslims. Abdullah even though with Islamic religious educational background is well accepted by Malaysians because he protects the rights of the non-Muslims communities and gives importance to national integration. As this being the case the non-Muslim communities have their responsibilities in sharing the limited wealth and preserving political stability through power-sharing, cooperation and mutual respect that could enhance permanent peace. It is hoped, through this approach, the Malaysians will be propelled, over time, to share equally in our nation's expanding economic pie.

The confidence of non-Muslim communities in Abdullah has grown stronger. Many of the non-Muslims were worried and cautious of him when he took office but his subsequent statements gave them the confidence that he would preserve the present stability now. His stand that the government would continue the present system of administration and would not implement different administrations based on religion was well received as a direction in the interest of all. The Prime Minister in his speech when inaugurating Islam Hadhari in Selangor

said, “Today I the Prime Minister, a Malay of Islamic religion, is the leader of the citizens of Malaysia, who hail from various races and religions. This government which exists in power sharing among the communities, must take into account their sensitivities, feelings, and hopes. As such Islam Hadhari which appears to direct the races towards excellences is the prime motivator to a prestigious Malaysia leading it to a peaceful and prosperous nation”.

The non-Muslims too have a role to play in the concept of Islam Hadhari. All the principles under this concept are not only to be followed by Muslims but by all the communities for it generates solidarity and achieve ‘excellence, glory and distinction’. All these principles are important as it focuses on role and responsibilities to ensure the future generation would preserve the noble relationship of the various ethnic groups in Malaysia. Naturally, Islam Hadhari also focuses on a just and trustworthy government, protection of the rights of minority groups and women, and working together with non-Muslims. The noble principle of work should be endorsed, embrace all Malaysians as we work towards the common good.

In general, the freedom to practice one’s religion, as enshrined in the Constitution, allows each community to act in consonant with their beliefs and tradition in their daily lives. This just provision gives more support to their position as Malaysians and thereby together help to develop the nation though resources are limited. Justice as this also gives apolitical importance but based on human values not taking into account their religion and race. This also balances the physical development of this country. Based on a just constitution, we can see the roles and responsibilities of the Malaysian community in general in the realization of national development based on justice and trust, centered upon human values, moral and culture. This is possible as the non-Muslims accept the reality that the assimilation Islamic values are not an obstacle to the practices of their religion culture and customs. Dissemination of non-Islamic religious are protected as they are the responsibilities of their religious leaders. Religion is the core of living and is the basis for policies of political parties, though of varying religions. From religions, Malaysians learn from one another the values inherent and this in turn ensures stability and harmony.

Islam Hadhari gives due concern to moral and social problems committed by both Muslims and non-Muslims. It also aims at reducing pressure and restlessness from UMNO’s partners within Barisan Nasional brought about by a large Muslim party, the issue of Hudud Law and Islamic State. Such wrong actions in a multi-racial society can destroy whatever has been achieved so far. In this modern world which aspires for progress, transgression of values must be thwarted and let intelligentsia and knowledge be the forefront in every aspect to strengthen any society.

Indeed the principles of Islam Hadhari lay stress on following what are good. Excellence of character is to be upheld for development. As a result the government has absorbed human values from religion as moral responsibilities to strengthen the civility of the ethnic. These are clearly stated in ‘Rukun Negara’, Vision 2020 and Islam Hadhari. Noble values and excellent morals are of paramount importance to ensure continuity of development. Every religion has its injunctions and prohibitions as Islam has in its Al-Quran and Sunnah. They are just as injunctions and prohibitions are not denials of freedom but to preserve goodness for both the Muslims and the non-Muslims. So, when the values in Islam Hadhari are spread it is clear that it would give full understanding to all. In the pursuit of development the non-Muslims too give due considerations to values, religion, morality ethics and norms of customs. Civilization could only last if these components are practiced and safeguarded.

Islam as the official religion of the major community of Malaysia is used as the foundation to strengthen the responsibilities of the community towards development. Other religions have never been sidelined. Abdullah in his forward in the Programme of celebrating national level Prophet Muhammad's birthday reminded the importance of remembering the message of Nabi Muhammad SAW, one of them is – 'act justly, to all the people, not taking into account their race, religion or lineage'. Based on this message, one of the principles of Islam Hadhari implemented by the government is being 'just and trustworthy' to all its citizens. Create new glories even though Islam is already glorious. This is the message obtained from the concept of Islam Hadhari. Noble values like trust, just, responsibility, moderation, cleanliness, effectiveness, efficiency, discipline, and cooperation, understanding and thankfulness are also stressed. These noble values will be the pillar in creating first class society in a first class nation. The campaign for noble and good deeds and the National Integration Plan (PIN) would help the authorities to fight moral declination based on responsibilities and provisions of the laws through proper governmental mechanism to implement them.

Islam Hadhari shows the importance of morals and values as the generator of progressive community. A community is said to be successful if it practices progressive values. There are ten principles put forward by Abdullah which the community must demonstrate, namely:

1. Faith and piety in Allah
2. A just and trustworthy government
3. A free and independent people
4. Mastery of knowledge
5. Balanced and comprehensive economic development
6. A good quality of life
7. Protection of the rights of minority groups and women
8. Cultural and moral integrity
9. Protection of the environment
10. Strong defenses

The assurance given by Abdullah that Islam does not differentiate between Muslims and non-Muslims in ensuring justice has received the support of non-Muslim leaders for Islam Hadhari. Many non-Muslims are aware of the responsibilities under the Constitution, Rukun Negara, Vision 2020 and Islam Hadhari. They have also the knowledge that each Muslim act piously abiding to religious values be they on politics, economy, education, family, business or in any other field. This increases his abidance in religious teachings and distances him from jealousy, abuse of trust, wrong doings and abuse of power. The role of the non-Muslims is clear that they fulfill the demands of nation-building and non-involvement in activities of abstraction of beliefs of the Muslims. It is not proper for Malaysian community to be hoodwinked by certain quarters that are unhappy of Malaysia's achievement in preserving racial harmony despite of using religion as its central point to protect peace and prosperity of the community and family.

The usage of universal values in drawing up policies for development; though majority are Muslims, shows the important function of religion to uphold justice, law and freedom, consideration, mutual-respect, cooperation and solidarity. The position of Islam as the official religion must be respected as there is freedom to practice other religions.

Conclusion

The desire of the leaders to see themselves as not only the leaders of Muslims but also of non-Muslims, due to the multi-ethnic environment must be respected and translated into strengthening, cooperation, solidarity and living peacefully. Intact stability would ensure the preservation of stability. Malaysia is a model nation of multi-ethnic society. It is only proper for the non-Muslims to come forward and bravely defend Islam which is being labeled as a threat to world peace by the west when in actual fact development and modernization of the country are enjoyed and the fulfillment of livelihood and demands of their religions are carried on without any obstacles.

The right balance of living that has been shown in spite of rapid economic development, which is also shared by non-Muslims; without ignoring noble values, should be brought to the attention of others as not as a preach but to give a true picture of Islam that they know. The wrong picture of Islam given by the west to further own selfish interest must be stopped. This could be done by the non-Muslim communities working together with the Muslim community as one united Malaysian ethnic. The aspirations upheld by the non-Muslims based on loyalty, solidarity, co-existence and sharing of national development must be voiced on the world stage so that Islam Hadhari could be shared to create a global community. Peace and harmony in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious context is the grand vision for our nation on the path towards 'excellence, glory and distinction' which has the feeling of responsibility on global peace and humanity because this is the essence of Islam Hadhari – moulding the glories of human civilization.

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