

# **THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC-CULTURAL FUSION, IDENTITY, ISLAMIC RESURGENCE AND CURRENT CHALLENGES IN THE MALAY LIFE<sup>1</sup>** **(EVOLUSI PENYATUAN KEBUDAYAAN ISLAM, IDENTITI, KEBANGKITAN ISLAM DAN CABARAN SEMASA DALAM KEHIDUPAN MELAYU)**

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## **Abstrak**

Di Malaysia banci penduduk terbaru menunjukkan bahawa umat Islam membentuk majoriti penduduknya iaitu 60%, pemeluk agama Buddha 19%, Kristian 9% Hindu 6.3%, Konfusis dan agama China tradisional yang lain 4.5%, manakala yang lain sama ada pengamal animisme atau tanpa agama. Dengan demikian Islam mewarnai secara definitif landskap budaya di Malaysia, manakala ciri-ciri agama dan budaya lain menambahkan keanekaannya. Bagi orang Melayu pemeluk agama Islam, keseluruhan aqidah, kepercayaan, amalan agama, nilai moral dan etika, ditunjangi oleh pengajaran Islam. Namun dalam beberapa amalan budayanya dapat dikesani ciri-ciri budaya indigenus dan Hindu antaranya amalan pengubatan dan penyembuhan tradisional, majlis pertabalan Sultan dan Yang Dipertuan Agong, dalam permainan wayang kulit, dan dalam upacara nikah kahwin, khatan dan sebagainya.

Apabila kuasa penjajah Barat menakluki dunia Melayu pada abad ke-16 dengan agenda tiga G (*gold, glory, Gospel*), maka masyarakat dan dunia Melayu mengalami kesan yang amat drastik, iaitu kelunturan

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<sup>1</sup> Expanded from a Lecture to the Students and Lecturers of the Department of Malay Studies, Cairo University of Egypt, on September 1, 2005

dominasi mereka dalam bidang politik, ekonomi dan budaya di tanah air mereka sendiri selama beberapa abad. Namun apabila gerakan penegakan semula Islam muncul dan diperkukuhkan oleh gerakan nasionalisme Melayu bermula pada awal abad ke-20, maka perjuangan untuk mendapat kemerdekaan bergolak dan memuncak kepada penubuhan UMNO pada tahun 1946 untuk melawan gagasan Malayan Union kerajaan British. Seterusnya melalui perundingan antara pemimpin UMNO ketiak Tunku Abdul Rahman dengan kerajaan British dan disokong oleh pemimpin-pemimpin parti Cina (MCA) dan India (MIC), maka kemerdekaan tanah Melayu telah dicapai pada tahun 1957.

Namun zaman pasca kemerdekaan menyaksikan berlakunya ketegangan dan keganasan kaum yang memuncak kepada Tragedi 13 Mei, 1969, yang membawa kepada perisytiharan Darurat. Berikutan daripada itu, kerajaan telah mengambil beberapa langkah proaktif untuk memupuk perpaduan nasional antaranya pembentukan sebuah parti gabungan Barisan Nasional menyatukan parti-parti utama berdasarkan kaum, minat dan wilayah, penubuhan Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan pembentukan Ideologi Negara iaitu Rukun Negara.

Kini cabaran utama ke atas umat Melayu dan Islam ialah pandangan negatif dan imej mereka yang tercorot di mata dunia. Orang Islam termasuk orang Melayu dianggap tidak toleran, taasub, pelampau dan umumnya tidak menghormati pemeluk-pemeluk agama lain. Gambaran yang terburuk ialah mengaitkan mereka dengan gerakan terrorisme dan kumpulan militan antarabangsa yang mengancam masyarakat dunia antarabangsa. Artikel ini mengemukakan beberapa strategi untuk mengatasi masalah ini.

### *Abstract*

*The Muslims in Malaysia makes up the majority of the population that is 60%, while the Buddhists 19%, Christians 9%, Hindus 6.3%, Chinese traditional religious believers 4.5% and the rest are either animists or sans religion. Thus Islam forms the definitive colouring or cultural landscape of Malaysia, with other religions and cultural elements adding to its overall patterns. The worldview, doctrinal belief and faith, ethical and moral values*

*of the Malays being all Muslims, are based on Islamic teaching. However in certain cultural practices, a cultural fusion of indigenous and Indian elements can be traced due to its historical experiences, especially in such traditional rituals of healings, pacification offerings and cleansing, and also in the installation ceremonies of the rulers and the King, the shadow play performances, marriages and rites-de-passage ceremonies, etc.*

*The colonization of the Western powers in the Malay world in the 16th century, have tremendous effect upon the Malays with their agenda of 3 Gs (gold, glory, Gospel), depriving them of their political, economic and cultural dominance in their own lands. However, the combination of Islamic revivalism and nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century became the basis of their struggle for independence, culminating in the formation of United Malay National Organization (UMNO) in 1946. In 1957, after several negotiations between the then leader of UMNO Tunku Abdul Rahman with the British government, and supported by the leaders of the Chinese organization (MCA) and the Indian organization (MIC), Malaysia obtained its independent.*

*The post independent era, however saw new challenges in the form of racial tension, conflicts and violence culminating in the 13th May 1969 riots that led to the declaration of Emergency Rule. Consequently several proactive measures were taken by the government, the major ones were the formation of the National Front a coalition party that brought together major political parties representing main ethnics, regional and interest groups, the formation of National Unity Department, and the formation National Ideology the Rukun Negara, to instils national integration and unity among the multi-ethnic-cultural-religious population.*

*However, the gravest challenge now faced by the Malays and Muslims as a whole, is the negative perception and the lowest possible image of them in the eyes of the world, perceiving them as people who are intolerant, violent, bigoted and generally disrespectful towards other religions, and worst, as terrorists threatening world security and peace. This article proposes some strategies to resolve these problems.*

## 1. Introduction

In Malaysia the latest population census showed that out of a total population of about 24 million, Muslims are 60%, Buddhists 19%, Christians 9%, Hindus 6.3%, Confucians and traditional Chinese religious believers 4.5%, and the rest 0.2% were either practitioners of tribal religions, sans religion or unknown religions.

In Indonesia the population census showed that of the total population of about 200 million, 88% are Muslims, the rest are Christians and Hindu-Buddhists. In Brunei too more than 90% of the population is Muslims. These statistics clearly show that this region which is traditionally known as the Malay Archipelago or the Malay World is still largely populated by Muslims and thus if one travels throughout this regions of about ¼ billion people (250 million), one can clearly see that it is largely colored by an Islamic cultural hue (*sibghatullah*) with mosques littering practically every few kilometers of the land, most people are attired in Islamic dresses (head scarves and long dress for ladies and caps for men), almost all restaurants (with the exception of the Chinese and Hindu restaurants) serve halal foods, and Islamic religious schools and madrasahs are found everywhere with children learning Islamic studies and the Qur'an everyday. However, underneath that mainstream Islamic coloring and characteristics, there still exists in marginal form, some primitive animistic practices and also Hindu-Buddhist elements especially in traditional Malay rituals of healing, pacification, offerings, cleansing, etc. and also in the installation ceremonies of kings, the shadow-play performances, and in marriage and rites-de-passage ceremonies.

## 2. The Malay Archipelago or the *Gugusan Kepulauan Melayu*

The region covering the Malay Peninsular, Borneo and about six thousand Islands of Indonesia and the Southern Philippines was traditionally known as the Malay Archipelago (see William Marsden, *A Grammar of Malayan Language*, 1812:i) or the *Gugusan Kepulauan Melayu*. It was also termed by the Malay writers of old as the *Tanah Jawi* or the Malay Land. The term *Jawi* originated from the Arabic word *Jawiyyun* that is of the people of *al-Jawah* the land of the fragrance wood

the *luban jawi* or *gaharu* in Malay, found only in the Malay Archipelago. Thus the word *Jawi* in Malay is synonymous with the word *Melayu* referring to attributes of the people originating from the Malay Archipelago (before it was divided in 1824 by the Treaty of London into British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies of Indonesia; the Philippines which was originally part of the Malay Sulu Kingdom was colonized by the Spanish, and the capital town *Fi Amanillah* was renamed as Manila).

There are several reasons to this Malay name, which transcended more than two hundred ethnic groups of the Malayo-Indonesian sub-family of Austronesian language. Firstly, the *lingua franca* of the region was and is still Malay, and secondly, the main religion is Islam. The religion of Islam which was propagated and disseminated in the Malay language or *Bahasa Jawi* strengthened further the Malayness of the region. Another important factor is the fact that the first area of the region to have received and embraced Islam was the Malay-speaking area of the Straits of Malacca, whose people subsequently became the prime movers of Islamic propagation and dissemination throughout the region. Thus the cultural aspect of Islam that was propagated and disseminated throughout this region was very much influenced by the Malays. This element became so prominent that the people of this region called themselves collectively as the *Bangsa Jawi* (the Malay nation) and their language as the *Bahasa Jawi* (the Malay language) using the *Jawi* script and their lands as the *Tanah Jawi* (the Malay Land).

*Bangsa Melayu* or *Bangsa Jawi* was and is still referred to the group of people who are Muslims, conversant in the Malay language and having cultural traits that are distinctly of Malay-Islamic coloring. Anyone who has internalized those three attributes is considered to have become a Malay, whether his ethnic origin is Javanese, Bugis, Achinese, Minang, Batak, Meranau (Southern Philippines), Melanau, Sambas, Sulu, Banjar, Sunda, Patani Malays (Southern Thailand) or even Indian, Arab, Chinese, African, or also Caucasian. So strong was this identity of Malay that it was entered into the Federation of Malaysia's Constitution (Article 160(2), see Mohd Sufian Hashim, 1976: 293) as the defining term of Malay, namely Malay is a person who:

- (a) habitually speaks Malay
- (b) professes the Islamic religion, and
- (c) conforms to Malay custom.

It is interesting to note that in the above definition of a Malay, no reference whatsoever is made to the racial and ethnic elements of a Malay, thus implying to the fact that Malay is cultural entity not ethnic neither racial.

### **3. The establishment of the Malay civilization and its cultural fusion**

There are three external influences that affected the culture of the Malays, namely the Indians, the Muslims and the Western cultures. However before the arrivals of those external influences, the Malays were already in possession of their own local culture some of which still survive to this day.

#### **3.1 The Indigenous Malay Beliefs**

Before the coming of the Indians, the Malays were practicing animism that is the indigenous belief that in every object whether living or non-living, there exists a soul or *semangat*, and that soul has the vital energy to affect man's life either adversely or positively, for example the soul of animals, big trees and stones, rivers and seas, and also the malignant souls of murdered human beings, women died of child birth, etc. In order to pacify those souls from infecting human beings adversely or utilize them for man's benefits, certain rituals of pacification, sacrificial offerings, etc were performed accompanied by chanting of incantations (*jampi*), sometimes accompanied also by the beating of small drums and traditional flutes and violins, which gave rise to the belief in magic and also the powerful role of the magicians, shamans or the *Pawang*, or *Bomoh* in traditional Malay society. However, in the modern Malay society these practices are dying out mainly due to the influence of Islam which considered those practices as *khurafat* and un-Islamic, though sometimes some marginal Malay Muslims still resort to them for certain unholy reasons such as to charm or "discharm" a women, to defeat and bring

calamities to the enemies, to enhance one's physical or spiritual powers and other dreadful purposes.

### 3.2 The Indian Influence on Malay Culture

The coming of the Indians into this region around the 1st Century C. E. brought the Indian cultural influence into the Malay society and the formation of several Malay kingdoms heavily colored by the Indian cultural, religious and political systems. The first major centre of civilization was the Malay-Buddhist Srivijaya kingdom flourished in the Island of Sumatra between 7th – 11th Century C. E., followed by the Javanese-Hindu Majapahit kingdom flourished in the island of Java between 12th – 15th Century C.E., and several other smaller kingdoms. The Malay civilization then was very much influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist culture of the Indians especially among the ruling elites.

The institutions of the king and court officials were mostly modeled upon the Hindu-Buddhist cosmological concept, where a kingdom was regarded as the shadow of the heavenly kingdom *Shurga* of the God, and the king as an incarnate of the God Siva-Buddha as thus he acquired the status of a God-King or *Diva-Raja*. This is symbolized by the various royal titles given to a king (now Sultan) such as *Duli Yang Maha Mulia* (The Holy Dust Under the Feet of the God-King), *Seri Paduka Baginda* (The Holy Slipper under the Holy Feet of the God-King), etc. royal addresses which are still in use today. The castle of the king were built on hilltop in the middle of the kingdom as a replica to the castle of the God Siva-Buddha on the cosmic mountain of Mahameru in the heaven, and the number of the court officials of 4, 8, 16, 32, etc. were based on the four cardinal points of the world. All the names of the court officials were also modeled on the Indian counterpart such as Bendahara or Perdana Menteri (Prime Minister), Menteri (Minister), Laksmana (General), etc. The installation ceremony of the king were mostly based on the Hindu-Buddhist ceremonies, such as the use of yellow clothes, the accompanying musical ensemble such as the traditional flutes or *nafiri*, the drums, the gong, etc. Another important remnant of the Hindu-Buddha influence among the Malays which survives to this day is the shadow-play performance still popular in the East Coast of

Peninsula Malaysia. The puppet master wearing yellow scarf sitting cross-legged in front of a tray of offerings for the spirits of four quarters of the world Ganesh, Arjuna, Sang Bhima and the Bhutas, he claimed to be the incarnation of God Vishnu, and he called upon the Gods Siva, Ganesh, and demigods of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, two sacred Sanskrit epics of the shadow play, to partake of the offerings and help to drive away evil spirits and assist him during his performance. It was not surprising that this form of shadow-play performance was banned by the Islamic Department of the state of Kelantan and a new form of performance was directed to be innovated to accommodate Islamic values discarding those un-Islamic elements.

In the field of literature Indian epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata influenced greatly the writing of Malay literary works such as *Hikayat Sri Rama*, *Hikayat Maharaja Rawana*, *Hikayat Perang Pendawa Jaya*, etc.

### 3.3 Islamic Influence on Malay Culture

Islam came to the Malay world around the 2nd Century Hijriah (H.) or 9th Century Miladiah (M) and beginning in the northern island of Sumatra Malay-Islamic Kingdoms were established, the first was Perlak in 840 C. E, then Samudera-Pasai in 976 C. E. Two renowned world travelers, Marco Polo visited Perlak in 1292 and found Islam was established in the kingdom, and Ibn Batutah visited Pasai in 1345 and found it to be a flourishing city-state governed by a pious Sultan. Then, in the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula the Terengganu Malay-Islamic kingdom was established in late 13th Century or beginning of the 14th Century C. E. (a stone edict inscribing the *shari'ah hudud* law written in Jawi script in 1303 was found).

Then, the famous Malay state of Malacca was established in 1400 whose king became a Muslim in 1414 C. E. and converted his entire courtiers and subjects into Islam. Subsequently other Malay-Islamic states were formed throughout the Malay Archipelago such as Acheh on the northern tip of Sumatra in 1507, the Johore-Riau kingdom in the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula together with the neighboring islands



in 1530/36, and other centers in the islands of Java, Borneo, Sulu, Sulawesi, Mindanao, etc. In these centers, Islam and the Malay language became the supra-elements that transcended and united them into a vast Malay civilization known as the *Tanah Jawi* (the Malay world), *Bangsa Jawi* (the Malay Nation), using the *Bahasa Jawi* (the Malay language) with a *tulisan Jawi* (the *Jawi* script).

Islam, indeed, brought many great transformations into the Malay society, culture and civilization. Three central elements in Malay culture and civilization can be identified to have been transformed tremendously, namely:

1. The worldview of the Malays which also motivates the transformation of values, norms, belief and other cultural elements,
2. The Malay language which was transformed into an Islamic language, in similar fashion as the Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Swahili languages; an adapted Arabic script called *Jawi* was used replacing the Indian script, Islamic religious and cultural terminologies were abundantly assimilated discarding many Hindu-Buddhist words, and Malay became the language of Islamic medium of instruction and dissemination throughout Southeast Asian region for nearly 1000 years before the ascendancy of the colonial languages during Western colonization.
3. The dynamism of the Malays transforming them from a regional nation within the Malay world to an international nation of the universal pan-Islamic ummah, connecting the Malay world and society to the Muslim civilization of North Africa, Middle East, Turkey, Persia and India. Malay trading ships plied the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Ocean, the South China Sea, besides the Java sea, the Sunda sea, and etc., participating in lucrative global international trades.

### 3.4 The Worldview of the Malays based on Islam

Worldview or in German *weltanschauung*, is the way and manner how an individual or a community conceive and view the worlds of existence or the universe that surround him; their nature, origin, creation, purpose and also the place and destiny of mankind within them.

With the coming of Islam, the worldview of the Malays transformed from the view that all objects have spirits e.g. trees, plants, hills, forest, stones, rivers, seas, etc. and that those spirits can affect mankind adversely or positively as found in animism of the primitive Malays, and from the belief of the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology that the world including mankind are governed and controlled by Gods and demigods in the heaven, to that of the worldview of Islam, which can be summarized as below:

1. Firstly, the view on the nature of the universe, which is regarded as the creation of God, and comprising the spiritual world (*alam arwah*), the present physical world (*alam dunia*) and also the world of the Hereafter (*alam akhirat*). The Hereafter is man's final destiny, which forms the final outcome of his lifelong endeavor in this world. His success in this worldly life is measured by his ability to believe, obey and submit to the revealed law and Divinity of Allah as the Creator and the Administrator of the universe, while success in the Hereafter is his final salvation in paradise. This world and all its contents are a trust from God to be used for the benefit of mankind per se, and not man's absolute right of ownership and disposal. All forms of trust will be made accountable in the Hereafter as to whether they are used in accordance with the revealed law of God or according one's whim and fancy. This Malay-Islamic view of the universe is in complete contrast to the outlook of secularism which regards the only universe is this physical world and man's only existence and destiny is in this-worldly life.

2. Islam as the true religion is the guidance from God, consisting of rules to regulate all manner of activities of man be it for the individual or for the society at large, for the purpose of achieving ultimate success in this worldly life as well as in the Hereafter. Hence, acquisition of knowledge of Islam is obligatory for each and every individual Muslim so that he can practice Islam fully and thus be able elevate himself from the status of an ordinary Muslim to the status of a true believer (*Muslim*) and even higher to the status of a pious, virtuous and godly person (*Muhsin*). The religion of Islam encompasses all the dimensions of life namely faith (*iman*), worship (*ibadah*), ethics and morality (*akhlaq*), social interaction (*mu'asharah*), cultural, political and economic interaction (*mu'amalah*), crimes and punishment (*hudud*), marriage, divorce and family life (*munakahah*) and the inner realm of sincerity and purity of intention (*ikhlas*).
3. Total conviction in the existence and reliance in the power of Allah as the Lord of the Universe who will give reward for all the good deeds one has done in this world, and vice versa punishment for the transgression that one has committed. Reward in this world is a blessed life living in complete accord with the requisite of God's revealed law, and reward of the life of the hereafter is admission into Paradise. Whatever calamities or difficulties that befall a Muslim in this world are regarded as means of forgiveness from God for sins committed, or for the purpose of elevating one's status through forbearance.
4. Islamic jurisprudence is the pivot of all vision, mission, objective, intention, action and operation in all fields of activities and endeavor of all Muslims. It is to be followed and adhered to without compromise, manipulation and rejection in all levels of its injunction namely the obligatory (*wajib*), the praiseworthy (*sunat*), the permissible (*harus*), the highly discouraged (*makruh*), and the forbidden (*haram*). The obligatory and the forbidden acts are both very distinct. Social norms are affixed upon the law, and the law is affixed upon

the Islamic jurisprudence (*shara'*), and the jurisprudence is affixed upon the Qur'an. In Malay this is expressed in an axiom, thus:

Customs are based on law,  
Law are based on syara' (Islamic legal code)  
Syara' are based on the Book of God (Qur'an)<sup>2</sup>

5. Value of the highest order is related to anything or everything that assist a Muslim to perform good deeds, acquiring admirable moral and ethical conduct which benefits himself and others. "The most perfect faith of a Muslim is one who is most admirable in his conduct" (the Prophet's tradition). A Muslim also is to honor another human being because each individual has the potential to achieve perfection. This positive attitude will have the effect of instilling humility and respect towards others and avoid the negative attitude of pride, vainglory, haughtiness and discrimination towards others based on race, lineage, status, wealth and the like.
6. The middle path or the moderate way of life and a balance between the physical, the intellectual and the spiritual, is the mode of living of the Muslims. The infra-structure, science, technology, knowledge and information are all know-how, tools and instruments that must be acquired as a collective obligation (*fardhu kifayah*) to serve the need of individuals and the society at large but for the ultimate purpose of augmenting them to become practicing Muslims, true believers (*Mu'min*) and ultimately to achieve the status of a virtuous, pious and godly person (*Muhsin*).

This Malay-Islamic worldview, which is actually based on the teaching of the Qur'an and the Hadith, becomes the pivot or the core

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<sup>2</sup> Adat bersendikan hukum,  
Hukum bersendikan shara'  
Shara' bersendikan Kitab Allah

values that influence the whole living activities of the Muslim Malays which are translated into six levels of operations, namely:

1. the level of belief and faith or the *aqā'id* and *iman*
2. the level of formalized ritual acts of devotion or *ibadah*, namely verbal solemnization of the *Kalimah shahadah*, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage to Mecca,
3. the level of social interaction and relationships with families, neighbors, communities, nations and whole mankind or the *mu'asharah*
4. the level of transactions, dealings, contracts, agreements, loans, trusts, etc. in economic, administrative, legislative, judicial, and politics, etc.
5. the level of ethics and morality or the *akhlaq* which bring about upright and noble characters in mankind that dispense goodness and benefits to others.
6. the level of intention or purpose or *niat* whether all actions and activities are for sole pleasure of Allah (*ikhlas*) or for shows and worldly benefits.

However in their practical application in those six levels of operations, one will find that among the Malays, as in any other Muslim societies everywhere, different shades and grades of qualities, from the very pious few (*Muhsin*) to the ordinary Muslims who make up the majority, and also to the nominal Muslims who adhere partially to the teaching of Islam.

When Islam was in its fullest glory in the Malay world, it became the prime mover to the development and establishment of Malay Islamic civilization in the Malay world in various centers, particularly during the sultanates of Malacca (15th Century C.E.) and Aceh (16th Century C. E.), as attested by the following quotations:

“No trading port as large as Malacca is known nor any where, they deal in such fine and highly prized merchandise. There is no doubt that the affairs of Malacca of great importance and of much profit and great honour. It is a land that cannot depreciate on account of its position, but must always grow.” (Armando Cortesao (ed.) *Suma Oriental of Tomme Pires*, 1944: 268).

*“Five centuries ago, Malacca hosted 2,000 ships each day, as many as crowd into modern day Singapore [sic], which boast of being one of the worlds three busiest ports. Cargoes of mace, nutmeg, cloves, sandalwood, tea, porcelains and silks passed through Malacca on their way to spice-hungry Europe. From the islands of the Archipelago to the south came camphor, birds’ nests, pepper, musk, gold and ivory. And from the West, mostly carried by traders from South Asia and the Middle East, came cotton, weapons, incense, opium, dyes, silver and medicinal drugs, as well as occasional bands of adventurous Portuguese. It was a place where Gujratis, Tamils and Bengalis from India lived and traded in secure harmony with Malays, Chinese and Arabs, a city of 100,000 where 84 languages could be heard in the Markets The Malay sultans who ruled Malacca ensured that the strait was free of pirates. Goods could be stored safely in hundreds of well-guarded godowns, and in case of disputes, the city’s law were administered fairly to both Malaccans and foreigners”.* (Simon Elegant in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 Jun, 1995:45)

*“In any case, the fact is that in the 16th century the Muslim world was once again powerful, wealthy, and touched with splendor. Whatever view he might take it, the Muslim of this period- in Morocco, Istanbul, Isfahan, Agra, Aceh- was participant in a history expansive and successful”.* (W. Cantwell Smith, 1957, *Islam in Modern History*: 38).

### 3.5 Western Colonization in the Malay World

With the coming of the Western colonial powers, those centers succumbed one by one to the colonization policy of the Europeans.

Malacca was occupied by the Portuguese in 1511, Manila by the Spanish in 1570, Jakarta and Malacca by the Dutch in 1619 and 1641 respectively, Penang and Singapore by the British in 1786 and 1819 respectively. The division of British Malaya and Dutch East Indies of Indonesia was finalized in 1824. The Federated Malay States was formed by the British in 1896 thereby weakening the powers of the Malay sultans. Aceh was defeated by the Dutch in 1899, and the Riau Sultanate was abolished by the Dutch in 1913, thus completing the subjugation.

With the almost complete subjugation of the Malay kingdoms and centers of power by the colonialists, Malay maritime trading communities and activities which previously dominated the whole region, were also wiped out, dislocating the majority of the Malays from the main stream economic and commercial centers and marginalizing them into villages as farmers, fishermen, petty craftsmen and traders, while the Malay courtiers in the capital towns, more often than not, indulged in various unproductive activities, and the district or minor chiefs busied themselves in levying taxes and revenues especially on mining activities. The Malays were relegated from a community “that ruled the waves to one that toiled the lands”.

With their political, economic and civilization bases of power vanquished, the Malays became a truncated community in their own motherland, eroding their self-confidence and competitive edge. The arrival of the immigrants, especially the Chinese and Indians, through an open door immigration policy of the colonial governments became the sources of labor, manpower and capital in the colonial economy. To the British colonial government the number of Chinese settlers were a reliable index of economic progress (B. W. Andaya & L. Y Andaya, 1982:179) The Chinese, especially, arrived in large numbers from China, and by 1891 made up half of the total population of the states of Selangor, Perak and Negeri Sembilan, while in Penang and Singapore they formed the majority. They occupied the main urban centers (forming 75% of Kuala Lumpur’s population in 1891) and were the main bearers of economic and commercial ventures, which further estranged the Malays from the main stream wealth-creation economic activities of the urban centers.

Majority of the Malays were reduced to the status of peasants, and consequently, during the colonial period, withdrew themselves in rural areas as farmers, fishermen, petty traders, craftsmen, etc. and in ritualistic religious learning and practices or irreligiousness and ignorance. Thus they were isolated from the mainstream universal development of world civilization. The main educational, administrative, political, and economic systems were secularized and westernized by the colonial government, with some Malays especially in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu still maintained their traditional Islamic education in the *madrasah* and *pondok*. The administration of Islamic institutions including the Islamic department, mosques, madrasah, religious schools, marriage and divorce, etc. were handled by the state religious department headed by the Chief Kadhi or Mufti with the Sultan as the figurehead.

#### **4. The revival of Islam in the twentieth century and its influence in political Islamic consciousness and struggles among the Malays that lead to Independence in 1957**

Islamic revivalist movements, which addressed internal weaknesses of Muslim society in the Muslim world dominated by secular Western powers, started around the end of the 18th Century and gained strong momentum in the beginning of the 20th Century.

The revivalist movement reached the Malay world in the middle of the 19th Century and became widespread at the beginning of the 20th Century with the return of Malay students from their studies in the Middle East, e.g. Tuanku Nan Renceh (1772-1832), Tuanku Imam Bonjol (1772-1864), Abdul Samad Muhammad Salleh or Tuan Tabal (1840-1891), Muhammad Yusuf bin Ahmad or Tok Kenali (1866-1933), Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin (1869-1957), Syed Sheikh al-Hadi (1867-1934), Kiyai Hj Ahmad Dahlan (1869-1923), Kiyai Hj Muhammad Hashim Asy'ari (1871-1947), etc. Through their activism in the forms of teaching, activist groupings, establishing schools, writing, publication of newspapers, journals, weeklies and pamphlets, the revivalist movement seeped into the Malay society and resulted in at least two main consequences.



Firstly, there arose a new spirit of Islamic fervor and resurgence among the Muslims to return to the original balance and pure form of Islamic practices and learning (the *salafiyyah*), emphasizing not only the formal ceremonial aspect of Islamic life and various rituals pertaining to the other-worldly life but also more importantly the application of Islamic values and injunctions in every aspect of living activities in this-worldly life. This fervor manifested in the forms of speeches, teaching and writings in newspapers, magazines, journals and pamphlets which sprouted profusely during this period, urging the Muslims to rid themselves of stagnated practices, blind following and too much emphasis on other-worldly rituals and outlook.

Secondly, Islamic political consciousness arose among the Muslim intelligentsia which soon blended with other Malay political movements such as the nationalist movement led by teachers who graduated from the Sultan Idris Teachers College, and gave rise to the Malay struggle for independence. A few Muslim personalities e.g. in Malaya Prof Zulkifli Muhammad (1927-1964), who became Deputy President of Pan-Malaya Islamic Party (PAS) in 1956-64, and in Indonesia Muhammad Natsir (1908-1993) who became the President of Majelis Syura Muslimin Indonesia (Masyumi) in 1949-1959 and Prime Minister of Indonesia (1950-51) and member of Indonesian Parliament (1955/56), involved themselves directly in political parties that strived for independence and political power.

In Malaya, the proposal by the British Colonial Government to establish Malayan Union in 1946, abolishing sovereign powers of the Sultans in the Malay states with a British Governor assuming all powers, were met with strong oppositions from all factions of the normally docile Malay society and galvanized them into a single force of protest. A Pan-Malayan Malay Congress representing 41 Malay associations of Malaya was held in Kuala Lumpur in March 1946 to discuss a united national Malay movement and a co-coordinated campaign against the Malayan Union. The result was the formation of United Malays National Organizations (UMNO) which was inaugurated at the following Congress held in May 1946 in Johore Bahru with the Chief Minister of Johore Dato Jaafar Onn elected as its first President. Due to strong campaigns of oppositions both in Malaya as well as in England, Malayan

Union was abolished and in its place the Federation of Malaya was created in 1948, thereby retaining the sovereignty of the Sultans, the individuality of Malay states, and instituting Malay special privileges vis-à-vis to the awarding of citizenship status to the non-Malays.

In 1957, after several negotiations between the then leader of Malay organizations Tunku Abdul Rahman with the British government and supported by the leaders of the Chinese and Indian organizations, Malaya got its independence from the British colonial government, and later in 1963 Malaysia was formed to include Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, the later, however, excluded itself in 1965. With that, the future of the country was in the hands of its peoples especially the elected government led by the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj.

With regards to the Islamic revivalism, two connected events occurred several years after independence that triggered greater impetus to the Islamic resurgence. Firstly, the tragic event of the 1969 racial clash mainly between Malays and Chinese, shocked the Malays tremendously, especially those who were living in Selangor state where in the 1969 election the Chinese-dominated opposition parties wrested almost half of the Selangor state seats. There emerged a feeling of insecurity and fear among the Malays that they were losing their political dominance as well, beside the economy. This fear and realization triggered several affirmative actions on the part of the government, such as accelerating the national language and educational policies, the launching of a 20-year National Economic Policy (NEP) 1970-1990, the increase in the University of Malaya's intake, the establishment of the National University of Malaysia (1971) and the expansion of MARA Institute of Technology to accommodate more Malay students into tertiary and professional education, etc.

The move resulted in the second important event of the 1970's, namely the heavy urban migration especially to the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, of rural Malay youths who were markedly stronger in their Islamic practices and inclination. Hence, it was in Kuala Lumpur that new and stronger impetus of Islamic resurgence of the 1970's and 1980's emerged among the Muslim youths, in the forms of more overt Islamic dressing and dietary preferences (halal food), emergence of Islamic

missionary (da'wah) movements and organizations (Jemaat Tabligh, Darul Arqam, al-Rahmaniah, etc.), formation of Muslim youth and student organizations (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), Muslim Students Associations at the Universities as well as national levels), establishment of Islamic kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, etc. ABIM, whose formation in 1972 was initiated among others by Anwar Ibrahim (its President in 1974-1982), was particularly active among the Malay youths and middle class urban Malays. Its primary aim was to transmit proper understanding of Islam through propagation (da'wah) and education (tarbiyah). It organized small-group sessions (usrah), training programs, talks, discussions, seminars and conferences. It published monthly magazines, pamphlets and books, and also ran kindergartens, primary and secondary schools throughout Malaysia. Basing on issues articulated by ABIM such as criticism on secularist and materialistic emphasis of national development at the expense of moral enhancement, violation of human rights such as Internal Security Act and Printing Press and Publication Act, politics of ethnic polarization (Bumiputraisim) which went against the Islamic concept of ummah based on universal human brotherhood, etc., it was clear that ABIM was in the forefront of Islamic resurgence, effectively communicating the aspirations of the Muslim community.

The government which was dominated by the Malay nationalist party, UMNO, also responded in kind by initiating in 1982 various programs to inculcate Islamic values in administration, television and radio programs, banking, education and etc. The government's Islamization processes gained tremendous boost and greater momentum when Anwar Ibrahim who was then a leader of Muslim Youth Organizations at national as well as international levels and an ardent critic of government's unislamic activities and a former leader of student activist groups, joined UMNO and the government in 1982. Consequently, the government initiated the establishment of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, Islamic Bank of Malaysia, Takaful Islamic Insurance Company, interest-free banking counters in major banks, upgrading and reorganization of the Syari'ah court and the tithe or zakat collection and distribution system, etc. They also established and strengthened departments and institutions in charge of Islamic propagation (Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia), research, publication

and enforcement of domestic Islamic affairs and information (Department of Islamic Advancement or Pusat Islam/Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), research, publication and dissemination of Islamic affairs and information at the international level (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia or IKIM). In a recent publication of Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia *Kenegaraan Malaysia dari Perspektif Islam (The Malaysian Statehood from An Islamic Perspective)*, 2000, Kuala Lumpur: YADIM, written by a panel of writers, it is interesting to note that the authors claim that Malaysia is indeed an Islamic State or *Dar al-Islam* as apposed to the concept and status of a non-Islamic state or *Dar al-Kufr* or *Dar al-Harb* (pp. 14-26). This effort is obviously to counter the allegation by the Islamic apposition party (PAS) that Malaysia is not an Islamic state because it does not implement the Shari'ah Law based on the Qur'an and the Hadith. Likewise, the Department of Islamic Advancement has also published in its website an article on the concept of Islamic State by the National University of Malaysia's academic Assoc. Prof Dr Abdul Halim el-Muhamamady (<http://www.islam.gov.my/e-rujukan/nislam.html>).

## 5. Cultural-Islamic Fusion in Malay Rituals, Practices and Festivals

Majority of the Malays with few exception, as mentioned above, observe the formal Islamic rituals of 1) the utterance and affirmation of Allah as the One God and Prophet Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah, 2) the five obligatory daily prayers together with the Friday prayer, 3) the month-long fasting in Ramadan, 4) the alms giving or zakat and fitrah, 5) the pilgrimage to Mecca to those who can afford. In these formal rituals the school (*mazhab*) of Shafi'e is observed throughout the Malay world based on the *Sunni* tradition. The most authoritative guide to the practices of prayer (*solah*) (including the various post-prayer liturgies (*aurad*) and supplication (*doa*)) is the writing of Sheikh Daud al-Fattani entitled *Munyat al-Musalli*, disseminated and practiced throughout the region.

The Friday congregational prayer and the *Tarawih* prayer in Ramadan are very much observed by most Malays, so much so the

mosques and prayer houses (*surau/ musalla*) are full to the brim. So too the two 'Eid prayers ('*Eidi l-Fitri*, '*Eidi l-Adhaha*), where both males and females wearing their new dresses, celebrate the auspicious occasions by going to the payer at the mosques or *musalla* early in the morning followed by visiting their relatives and friends later in the day.

During the '*Eidi l-Adhaha* celebration many Muslim families offer sacrifices of animals where meats are distributed among the needy in their communities. During the two 'Eid celebrations, especially the '*Eidi l-Fitri* which is considered as the day feasting after month-long fasting, foods are abundantly prepared including the must-have date fruits, to serve family members and visitors who come to the house.

Other cultural-religious practices as observed by the Malays, though in lesser grades, are the *Nisfu Syah'ban* where Muslims gather in the mosques and prayer houses to recite *Surah Yasin* three times and supplications are made to Allah, and the celebration of the first day of the Hijriah new Year the *Awal Muharram* where activities in the forms of speeches and award giving ceremonies to prominent Muslim personalities, are celebrated at national and state levels. The Prophet's Birthday or the *Maulid Nabi* is also celebrated at national and state levels in the forms of parade and speeches. Another religious occasions celebrated is the Night of the Prophet's Ascension or *Isra' and Mi'raj* where Muslims gather at the mosques and listen to the reading and elaboration of the book on the subject given by an Islamic scholar or *ulama'*. A weekly reading of *Surah Yasin* and supplication is also commonly practiced at the mosques on every Friday night led by the Imam of the mosque

Besides those regular practices and celebrations, there is the occasional practice of the ritual feast or *kenduri tablil*, where a person invites his neighbors to his house for a feast, prayer and supplication, to appeal to Allah for safety, security, order, peace, patience and generosity, according the particular need of the time and occasion. The main component of the ritual is the prayer in need (*salat hajat*), the reading of *Surah Yasin*, utterance of the liturgical formula (*zikir*), and finally the supplication (*du'a*) all performed in congregation led by an *Imam*. The occasion ends with a feast as a kind of appreciation by the host to the guests for their participation.

## **6. Humanity's Critical Challenge of the 21st Century: Inter-Religious and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue or Clashes?**

Malaysia, being a heterogeneous society with plurality in religion, cultural tradition, and ethnicity, needs a harmonious living condition among its citizens to ensure peace and stability within the nation. Thus, a kind of religious and cultural tolerance and inter-relationship is very much needed. One way of achieving it is through inter-religious and inter-cultural/civilization dialogue

Globally, never, perhaps, in our modern history, the need for inter-religious and inter-cultural/civilization dialogue, is more pressing and critical than the present time. Most of the hotspots of conflicts on the map of the world today are occurring between different religious faiths, religious sects and or cultural groupings. The major ones are:

- (1) The Zionist Israel and Arab Palestine conflict spanning more than half a century and killing hundred thousands of life and displacing thousands of Palestinians,
- (2) Northern Ireland between the Catholics and the Protestant sects of Christianity,
- (3) South-Eastern Europe between the Orthodox Christians and Muslims,
- (4) Sudan and Indonesia between the Muslims and the Christians,
- (5) Kashmir and India between the Hindus and Muslims,
- (6) Sri Lanka between the Hindus and Buddhists,
- (7) Armenia-Azerbaijan between the Christians and Muslims,
- (8) Pakistan between the Sunnis and the Shi'as of the sects of Islam,

- (9) The September 11, 2001 suicidal attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the U.S. alleged to be perpetrated by Muslim terrorists,
- (10) The retaliatory attack by the U.S. on Afghanistan alleged to be harboring those terrorists,
- (11) The attack, occupation and destruction of Iraq by the U.S. and its allies, and the continued violence, suicide attacks and killings that goes on unabated taking thousands of lives with majority of them civilians
- (12) The dangerous conflict, rhetoric and skirmishes which may lead to all-out war (God forbid) between two nuclear powers of Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India (though currently reconciliatory moves and meetings were being held between officials of the two nations),
- (13) The July 2005 Bombing of London underground and bus and the subsequent harassment and persecution of Muslims in U.K. & Europe
- (14) The 2005 Egyptian Hotel bombing at Aqaba,
- (15) The continuous conflicts, killings and tension between the Buddhist government of Thailand and the Muslim majority in the South, taking hundreds of lives mostly Muslims.

The most daunting challenge on humanity and world peace is without a doubt the September 11, 2001 suicidal attack on the United States of America's World Trade Center and the Pentagon alleged to be perpetrated by a group of Muslim extremist-deviationists bent on confronting and destroying United States of America which they perceived to be the source of Muslim anguish, sufferings and deaths in the Middle East and elsewhere. This led to retaliatory attack and destruction of Afghanistan and later of Iraq by the U.S. and its allies. Since then, the world situation is tense with almost every nation in the world is fearful of terrorist attacks and violence coming to their soils.

Natural disaster of tremendous dimensions such as the 2004 Tsunami disaster around the Indian Ocean, followed by earthquakes, floods, cyclones and typhoons, and also numerous air disasters all over the world, make the people of the world every where full of fear and uncertainty. The world is not so safe anymore.

Undoubtedly in the current prevailing condition of the world, inter-faith, inter-religious and inter-civilization dialogues become critically necessary indeed. The intense and rapid globalization process has brought together in direct contact various communities, nations and religious faiths, without much filter and buffer mechanisms, giving rise to bewilderment, challenges, threats, prejudices and conflicts. In previous era, various communities could live in isolation in their own enclaves and localities. Thus intra-religious and intra-civilization dialogues were the norm. However, in the present situation of direct contact and interaction in all realms of living whether in economic activities, socialization, education, administration and politic, inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-civilization dialogues should be the norm of the day.

In political arena, where every political party clamor for public supports and power, extolling their own virtues and superiority while condemning others, then friction, tension and conflicts among different party members and supporters bound to happen. If such condemnation and censure against other political parties revolve around political manifesto, agenda and programs, such action may not give rise to high tension and extreme animosity. However, when it touches upon religion and cultural peculiarities of any community which run deep in the mind, heart and soul of the community, then trouble and violence may erupt.

The reality with Islam is that it is a religion that embraces all the realms of human activities. It is not just a religious belief pertaining to a personal God with a collection of personal or communal rituals restricted to some religious occasions and celebrations. Islam is a way of life with revealed laws and injunctions that govern and embrace the whole of mankind's activities individually as well as collectively. It embraces all activities at the levels of the family, community, society, nation-states as well as the whole humanity. Hence, Islamic laws and injunctions postulate and regulate every attitude, principle of thought, values and actions of



every Muslims in all the six principal dimensions of worldly life, namely: (1) faith and belief (*aqidah/iman*), (2) religious formal rituals (*'ibadah*), (3) ethics and morality (*akhlaq/adab*), (4) cultural interactions (*mu'asharah*), (5) social interactions (*mu'amalah*), (6) marriage and family (*munakahah*).

Faith, belief and formal religious rituals form all the formalities of Islamic practices such as five daily prayers at the mosque or at home, the weekly Friday prayer at the mosque, the Ramadan fasting, the alms-giving and charities, the reading of the Qur'an, the Pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.

Social interactions include all the social activities of mankind living in social groups and society such as economic, political, educational, strategic, security, defense, judicial, administrative, leadership, power and government, recreational. Cultural features and interactions comprise the values, norms, forms, systems, structures, institutions and organizations both material and non-materials that underpin and regulate the cultural life of the community and society manifested in the forms of customs, law, values, thought, philosophy, shelter, dress, food, language, literature, art, games, etc. Hence, in Islam the whole life is governed and regulated by the revealed law of God called the *shari'ah*, and one's life is deemed to be Islamic when the *shari'ah* is completely adhered to. However, the *shari'ah* in most areas especially in the social and cultural realms is revealed only in general principles, and it is left to the body of Muslims to apply these general principles into actual action and operation within the context and need of a particular time and place. Thus, Islam has both the features of universalism and particularism. It is universal and perennial as it can be applied to any society, locality and in any period of time. It is particular when it is operationalised by a society and adjusted to the prevailing condition of the particular time and space in accord with the natural and social environment of the locality, resulting in a fusion of Islamic elements with the local culture.

With the current wave of strong Islamic resurgence, the Muslims are reviving and reaffirming their Islamic practices in all those six realms of life described above, including the social and cultural realms, which invariably bring them into direct contact with other religious and cultural

groups co-existing in plural societies and nation-states. Consequently, a situation will arise where to the Muslims, reviving and reaffirming those Islamic practices become a religious obligation where no other religious and cultural groups have the right to criticize and interfere. Any such comment and criticism is deemed to be a religious apposition and confrontation which will invariably lead to conflicts, retaliation and violence. On the other hand, some of the Islamic injunctions in the social realm such as in the government, administration, judicial and legislature may impinge upon the rights and privileges of other religious and cultural groups, which will understandably give rise to protest and detest. This is where the principle of religious freedom as upheld by Islam must be adhered to faithfully.

The Qur'an has given clear injunctions on this subject. "Let there be no compulsion in religion; truth stands out clear from error" (2:256), "I will not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that I worship. To you your religion and to me mine" (109:456), "O mankind! We created you from a single pair (Adam and Eve) and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (amicably and not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous. And God has full knowledge and well-acquainted with all things (49:13)". In this Qur'anic injunction, it is clear that the Muslims, in the process of reviving and reaffirming Islamic practices that have direct contact with the non-Muslims, must be careful not to force them upon the non-Muslims. Thus, the governing principle underpinning any operation of Islamic rules and regulations in all social interactions, contracts, agreements, transactions, etc., must be applied, administered and implemented upon the Muslims only, and must not impinge in anyway the rights, freedom and practices of the non-Muslims' religious and cultural norms.

Nonetheless, the doctrinal differences aside, there are many norms, values and principles that are common among different religions and cultures, especially pertaining to basic universal values such as human rights, ethical and moral values. Thus, to instill and enhance mutual understanding, respect and cordial relationship (as propagated by the Qur'an) among various religious and cultural groups, the dialogues must search and emphasize the common features shared by them. In this

manner they can help each other in realizing and actualizing them and establish the practices of giving and helping each other the common good.

## **7. Extremism, fanaticism and religious violence: the real challenge and threat to humanities of all religious faiths**

It is an accepted norm and practice of all religions to propagate and exhort peaceful and harmonious living within human society at home and at large. As a result the majority of the adherents of religious faiths are peaceful and also respectful of other religions' adherents. They may frown or become bewildered by the practices of other religions, but largely they are tolerant of the differences and peculiarities of different religions. However there exist in any religious group and even in many social groups as well, a small minority of people who can be said to have inherent inclination towards extremism, fanaticism, dogmatisms, bigotry and militarism.

Extremism (*ghullu*) is the quality, attitude, interpretation, advocacy and practice of one's own group ideas, ways, rules, regulations, injunctions, custom, ideology, etc., in its most literal, formalized or excessive or exaggerated form, deviated from the norm, the usual or the middle path, without taking into consideration the varieties of social and cultural conditions existing at different times and places. In the process of its advocacy or implementation, the tendency is to force it upon others, which will invariably lead to conflict, oppression and violence. Islam unequivocally propagates moderation, tolerance, temperance and the middle path.

Dogmatism, bigotry and fanaticism (*ta'sub*) are attitude, outlook, behavior, advocacy and practices of one's own group ideas, ways, rules, regulations, ideology, etc., and unbendingly, intolerantly, relentlessly, obstinately and arrogantly upholding them, while deeming and condemning others as false and unacceptable. It is the unwillingness to agree to disagree and to respect the inherent differences existing among human beings. Also there is a tendency to enforce owns viewpoint upon others which will lead invariably to conflict, violence, oppression, militarism and terrorism.

Islam, on the other hand, teaches tolerance, freedom of faith, belief and religious practices among mankind, and also acknowledges plurality in culture, religion and civilization. However, although Islam acknowledges plurality in religion, it does not accept in its belief and practices the concept of religious relativism (truth is relative and therefore all religions have element of truth and are of the same status) and syncretism (assimilation of other religious elements). Religious plurality means to accept the existence of other religions and to respect the differences, while upholding faithfully one's own religion without compromise, apology and syncretism. At the same time, one should also seek to learn and emphasize the common positive elements existing in every religion especially in the ethical aspects, e.g. helping the weak and the destitute, protecting the environment, cementing the brotherhood of humanity, etc. On the doctrinal differences of religions we should give less prominent in the public realm, least of all condemnation of other religions, and leave them to God to make the final arbitration, as propagated by the Qur'an:

“To you be your religion, and to me, mine (Q. 109:6)

“We are not accountable for each others' deed. God will assemble all of us (in the Hereafter) and will deliver the Judgment with truth. God is the highest Arbitrator and most Knowledgeable.” (Q. 34:24-26).

Although Islam is a missionary religion and advocates its propagation to all human beings, the manner to do it must be peaceful and with the highest wisdom, beautiful preaching, tolerance and forbearance, and to leave its acceptance in the hand of God, as taught by the Qur'an:

“Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best.” (Q. 16:125).

“Let there be no compulsion in religion; truth stands out clear from error” (Q. 2:256)

“... If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single community, but His plan is to test you in what He has given you. So strive as in a race in all virtues. The return of you all is to Allah; it is He who will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute”. (Q. 5:48)

“By the (token of) time!, verily man is in loss. Except such as have faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual enjoining of truth and of patience and constancy” (Q. 103:1-3)

## **8. Conclusion**

From the discussion above and from the various quotations of the Qur’an, it is abundantly clear that Islam is indeed a religion, a way of life that acknowledges and accepts religious diversity in a society, and censures religious discord and conflict. Though it advocates propagation and dissemination of Islam, the manner to do it must be peaceful and with the highest wisdom and beautiful preaching, so that truth will prevail over falsehood voluntarily without force or coercion. The failure to do so lies wholly on the part of the propagators themselves, not on those who have been invited, and much less the message itself.

Thus the present conducive environment of inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue, interaction and communication now prevailing in Malaysia, where non-Muslims are not only prepared but anxious to listen to the discourse of the Muslims pertaining to Islamic position on current issues discussed above (they even created a web-site <http://www.analysismalaysia.com/> in order to analyze Islam), it is indeed a golden opportunity for the Muslims to “Invite (all) to the way of your God with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.” (Q. 16:125). If this framework of graciousness and wisdom can be fulfilled by the resurgent Muslims and not carried away by their unbridled passion and fervor especially in the face of zealous articulation of rejection of the concept of Islamic state both by the DAP and Chinese-based component parties of the

government namely the MCA and Gerakan, then there will certainly be a bright tomorrow for the Malaysian nation and civilization, God willing.

Wa l-Lahu 'a`lamu bi s-sowab wa l-hamdulillahi r-Rabbi l--alamin.

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