

24/12/1999

Religious education needs a new curriculum

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ON the kind of Islam we want to see in this country: Historically, at least before independence, Islam did not have a role in Government or in the development of this country. Islam then was only for personal practice.

Religious schools also focused more on religious instruction for daily needs.

When we became independent, we put in place a more systematic religious education.

In my days, if you wanted religious education, you had to go to private school. And religious education was the only available education at the secondary level for poor rural folk.

After independence, when we could provide religious education for everyone, more people wanted religion to play a role in the development of the country.

But this awareness came at a time when we were still not able to do many things.

People were talking about Islamic medicine, Islamic economies, Islamic financing - but where were the experts in this fields? We didn't have them.

The young also were beginning to want more, to have Islam play a bigger role in their daily lives. They were beginning to believe that Islam as a system could solve problems.

This desire among the young became more pronounced when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad became Prime Minister.

So when he introduced Islamic values in the running of Government, it coincided with the Look East Policy, which was created to allow us to learn Japanese work ethics.

Islam also had these values - hard work, honesty, integrity. So one of the ways to inculcate these values in the civil service was to allow offices to invite speakers to conduct religious ceramah at government departments.

But who were the speakers? No one then was really concerned about this. But this led to a shift in the atmosphere in government departments.

So where is Umno in all this? Although religion is on Umno's agenda, the party itself never had a document to explain the approach to Islam.

We had the New Economic Policy for the economy, the Rahman Talib Report for education but we did not have a document for religion.