

Why PAS needs more Dr Dzuls
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Maszlee Malik & Dr Musa Mohd Nordin

It is rather surprising that the Western media started to call Ennahda party in Tunisia as a 'moderate Islamist party'. The same label has been used to describe the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, to differentiate them from the 'radical' Salafi parties.

It was not the case a couple of years ago and unimaginable by many, considering we are just 10 years post-911; the tragic bombing of the World Trade Center in New York.

'Moderate' Islamists appears to be a new jargon to describe the 'not so bad' Muslim guys who were previously designated with a plethora of Islamophobic labels by the same media that included, among others, 'the radical Islamists', 'extremist banned group', "radical Islamic fundamentalists", "jihadist militants", etc.

Finally, there is now hope that the many self-proclaimed political Islam experts in the Western media would awaken to the fact that the term 'Islamist' is not a monolithic one.

It is most unfortunate that JL Esposito's piece, 'Islamic threat: Myth or Reality' was never given much attention to many to better understand this phenomenon.

Esposito's thoughts might be seen as an outlier when contrasted against the tsunami of Islamophobic writings published post-911. However, it is an excellent beginner's book to better understand the wide parameters of the much varied global-Islamism phenomenon and trends.

In *surah Al-Baqarah* verse 143, Allah says "Thus have We made of you an ummah (nation) justly balanced, that you might be witnesses upon mankind...".

Interestingly, this verse resides smack in the middle of the *surah* which contains 286 verses, further emphasising the concept of the middle nation (*ummatah wasata*); justly balanced and embracing moderation in its clarion call for change and reformation.

Universal persona of a moderate Islamist

We are thus convinced that in the midst of the many loosely defined "Islamists", there exists the "moderate and justly balanced Islamist". This immediately begs the question, "how does one define one?"

This calls to mind Karim Raslan's foreword to Dzulkefly Ahmad's new book, "Striving for Change". After admitting his historical 'stereotyping' of all Islamists, it eventually dawned upon him that there are such persons or movements that can be described as moderate Islamists.

We could not agree more with Karim and think that there are many who share similar analyses and sentiments. In this respect, we can vouch that friends and foes of Dzulkefly, better known as Dr Dzul, would unanimously echo that this Dr Dzul guy is truly a universal persona of a moderate Islamist.

His Islamic activism dates back to his student days in Birmingham, UK, in the mid-70s. His excellence in academia landed him a doctorate in medical sciences (toxicology) from Imperial College, London, and he taught both medical sciences and Islamic civilisation at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang.

Very much a self-taught economist, Dr Dzul has proven his mettle by jointly spearheading the Pakatan shadow cabinet on financial matters besetting the nation.

A prolific writer and an orator of substance, he has all the makings of a credible and iconic politician to represent the professional group among Malaysian Islamists.

His added and rare asset is his ability to master the Arabic language and his invaluable training in the skills and competence to understand, reflect and contextualise the meaning of the Quran and traditions of the Prophet, which makes him a new symbol of transformative Muslim leadership in Malaysia.

Islamist, economist and crooner

Dr Dzul's brand of down-to-earth, facilitative, hands-on and savvy Islamic leadership is being increasingly accepted, not only within the ranks of his party, his constituents in Kuala Selangor and his colleagues in Pakatan, but also by the lay public, both Muslims and non-Muslim alike.

Having read his blog, analysed his writings in the various online news portals, watched his many interviews, listened to his public *ceramah* (talks) and viewed his parliamentary sessions as a lawmaker, Dr Dzul, in our opinion, embodies a breakthrough, a new hope for the "izzah", an honourable and noble positioning of Islam within the landscape of Malaysian politics, unlike that adulterated and tarnished by the parochial and racist representation of Islam in the past 50 years post-Independence.

As friends of Dr Dzul since prior to his political debut, we might be ruled to be jaundiced in our assessment of his performance but you are at liberty to seek the opinions of others on Dr Dzul, the "Islamic democrat".

Furthermore, as a PAS central committee member and think-tank maestro, it is kind of difficult to fathom that this same pious guy has his own musical choir consisting of his wife, children and in-laws, which they have labelled 'the Wayfarers'.

They blasted a few "hot numbers", among others Il Divo's "I believe in you" and an Arabic version of the original Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' at a fund-raiser in Kelab Shah Alam on the Dec 18, 2011, attended by a microcosm of the Malaysia populace.

Dr Dzul's willingness to engage and embrace others in crystallising his vision and his commitments to "*memberikan yang terbaik untuk agama, rakyat dan negara* (nothing less than the best for religion, people and the nation)" sets new and enviable benchmarks for the Muslim politician in multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaysia.

If PAS is seriously hoping and planning on the long walk to Putrajaya as part of an engaging and trusted partner in a Pakatan Rakyat-led federal government, then it should be seriously considering cloning the Dr Dzul template in its rank and file and not fear losing one or more Hasans or Nashas.

The Dr Dzul aura represents the contemporary best of PAS' political culture in the Pakatan bandwagon for change towards a new and better Malaysia.

MAZLEE MALIK is a senior lecturer at Universiti Islam Antarabangsa while DR MUSA MOHD NORDIN is a medical practitioner and member of the Muslim Professionals Forum.