

PAS, re-educate your electorate!
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COMMENT It is too much to ask PAS information chief Mahfuz Omar to have clear talking points on why Umno or any of us out here should be persuaded to support its hudud plan, instead of name calling?

The plea of Hanipa Maidin (left) that support for hudud in Kelantan would be better served if Norway had hudud may give a hint that Pas is probably at its wit's end. There are no new arguments to be brought forth from Pas and Umno's hudud-implementation sympathisers.

This is not surprising. It boils down to what Azhar Ibrahim repeatedly emphasises in his book (Contemporary Islamic Discourse in the Malay-Indonesian World, 2014. SIRD), that there is poor development of intellectual scholarship in the Malay literature of religious traditionalism and the revivalism of the 70s.

This book would be helpful to those of us who do not read Malay or who do not read the relevant literature on Malay Muslim thinking in our own society. It provides a backgrounder in understanding the political thinking of our Malay Muslim leaders in PAS, Umno and Pakatan Rakyat, and Muslim-based NGOs.

The scholarship of that period considers reason inimical to revelation. The revivalists of the 70s have no real interest in learning the work of reformist and progressive scholars at home and abroad, except for a few ideologues like Maududi and Sayyid Qutb.

Reformers calling for the use of reason are made scapegoats for "secularist agents of the West" or are labelled Shi'ites, without going into an intellectual engagement of what constitutes their disagreement.

Abdullahi Ahmed An Naim in his continuing efforts to help Muslims at their wits' end on this Islamic state-hudud issue suggests that the notion of an "Islamic state" is post-colonial because the term and concept do not exist in pre-colonial Islamic thought. An "Islamic state" is illusory.

There is no standard Islamic state from which we should take for our own statehood and nation-building. Abdullahi Ahmed suggests that Muslims should instead advance prospects of democratic governance in their plural societies.

I would think that advancing prospects of democratic governance in our plural society must mean that Islam may or may not be the dominant feature of our statehood and nation-building. Let us take it from there.

Conflict of civil-Islamic laws must first be solved

Malaysians have provided a huge hint to political parties for a moratorium on any new Islamic law until the problems arising from the conflict of civil and Islamic laws are solved.

The opposition parties are probably saying these laws were made under BN rule, so let BN fix it. But BN is not fixing it. This is surely a matter of good governance and we the citizens are in despair over our politicians over this.

We probably have to think a little harder on the kind of institutional arrangements to be put in place in order for us to have a better and more informed decision-making for policy direction. And this cannot be just at the polling booth. We had almost two decades of this controversy and it is not getting us anywhere closer to resolving it.

The call for the Islamic state, and consequently hudud, are reformation ideas of the Islamic revivalist movement of the 70s, which have also fashioned the ideas of statehood and nation-building of Malays.

Will PAS and Umno hudud-implementing sympathisers think they will succeed where most other countries have fared dismally at this? The evidence is out there. The desire to push this through, at all costs, is, to me, sheer arrogance. PAS repeats that it has a promise to its electorate. I say, re-educate your electorate.

I suspect that the option of re-education is not in its agenda. So the more reason for us to better understand the Malay-Muslim Islamic discourse of the 70s and develop a people's independent analysis. Part of that work is already done by Azhar Ibrahim's writings in English, and apparently a host of other independent local researchers/academia writings in Malay.

Muslim reformers today cannot be certain if indeed hudud has been implemented throughout the period of the glorious caliphates. True, the fiqhi books have contained the interpretations of the scholars. These interpretations were developed 100 years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The existence of the textbooks as scholarly works does not necessarily mean that they are implemented.

Even now, Malaysians must know that Muslims mostly cite that one example of the Caliph Omar, who had suspended the hudud punishment on theft. Caliph Omar had also not punished those drinking wine in the privacy of their homes as he respected the principle of privacy. Caliph Abu Bakar had introduced lashes for drinking wine. These are anecdotal.

Conservative elements in both Umno and PAS will be vigilant in locking out the democratic spaces for dissent. The scholar, Kassim Ahmad (on the left), for instance, has been highly critical of conservative elements of Malay society. Mahfuz Omar had also called for his arrest.

Kassim Ahmad has been demonised for his views on hadith literature and this

demonisation has overshadowed his other writings. Faisal Tehrani, a young public intellectual, had his book recently banned under Umno's watch. He too has been writing critically of the Malay leadership.

Can we really afford another 10 to 20 years of un-ending debate?

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