

New opportunities in Malaysia-US relations
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COMMENT The trusteeship for leadership of the human race had been lost by the Muslims since approximately 1492 CE, when the Catholic forces of Europe both discovered America and took Granada as the last stronghold of the Muslims in Spain.

If western historians have neglected to notice this interesting simultaneity in one of the major "turning points" of human history, it could be because they did not want to admit that the Muslims ever did have human civilisation's leadership, while Europe stank in the Dark Ages of not bathing for months at a time (among other things).



What can we now expect to transpire with the Obama appointment of Paul W Jones as the new US "emissary" to Malaysia?

To be optimistic, it could be that this is one of various signs that the trusteeship is passing back to the Muslims after the recent decline of the English-speaking world.

And in this case, rather than "bite the hand" that has been feeding us (the US is arguably the "breadbasket" of much of the world with the tremendous efficiency of its agricultural sector), we Muslims had best rescue as much knowledge and know-how as possible from them, in preparation for a real resurgence of a global Islamic leadership.

A visit to Yogyakarta in Indonesia is telling. The young people there are now busy learning European languages, such as French, German, and Italian, rather than the English they used to pursue so assiduously.

Why? It seems the recent rebound of Yogya's tourism sector, which involved many service businesses supporting local families, is due to increasing arrivals of new middle-class folk from the non-English-speaking world, who are not yet quite as bankrupt as many citizens in the USA and the UK.

'Europeans don't have fear of Muslims'

And there is another factor, as yet largely unnoticed in the entire hullabaloo about Islamophobia. Our observation is that among Europeans (although not, perhaps, the British), there is virtually no FEAR, as such, about Muslims.

Inconvenience, irritation, mistrust, even prejudice perhaps, but no real fear. European white-skinned Muslims do not hide themselves, as many American ones do. Nor do they feel compelled to emigrate abroad, except by personal preference.

We might say the same for Malaysia, whatever suspicions local people may have about the foreign Muslims immigrating here, especially those becoming Muslim so as to marry local women rather than out of any sense of love or commitment to Islam.



More and more converted Muslims seem to be arriving, and it is easier in Malaysia than any other Muslim country for these immigrants to gain permanent residence from the government, although there is still no explicit provision for "Musafirun" under Malaysian law.

So one thing Malaysia may present to the new "emissary" from the USA is that a degree of freedom and tolerance does exist here, and to a significant degree. Almost all foreign Muslims in other Muslim-majority countries remain "Musafirun" and are welcome only as long as they are sponsored by a full-time employer. This is definitely not "Muhajir" status, although converted Muslims usually have to make do with it.

And what, on the other hand, can Malaysians salvage from the somewhat declining western societies? This country has a certain morale-building philosophy of the duties of the public media. However, as becomes apparent now and then, this "patriotic" duty sometimes crosses the line into too much government control.

Soul-searching in Malaysian media

Malaysian media did a certain amount of soul-searching after the surprise wins of the opposition a few years ago.

However, their attention seemed to return rather quickly to a less-than-free press and broadcast media, whose thrust seems mostly to have been whatever the government wants it to be.

Opposition and criticism are there, to be sure, yet not quite in the same spirit and style as the media in, say, Bangkok or Jakarta.

Perhaps "sedition" is not a term that should be applied to the exercise of free speech, or, as Thomas Jefferson made perfectly clear during the early days of America's own "Merdeka", the term should be applied only to overt actions, not to the thoughts of the citizenry.

Major corrections to American foreign policy, such as during the Vietnam war or the deposing of Richard Nixon, have been brought about by the media there. The judgments about these actions are made by media managers and their public, not by the central government. Perhaps Malaysia has something to learn from this.

In any case, there must be many issues in Malaysian politics that can be brought into sharper dialogue or even dialectic with the Americans. The meaning of "dialectic" is a process of communication that aims to bring about new knowledge on both sides, rather than "winning" or "losing" debating points.

If four out of five of the top universities in a recent QS global survey are American, it may be partly because Americans understand and value this process of dialectic, with, for example, the media playing one part of the process rather than merely echoing government policy.

In this case, Malaysia needs to learn the value of opposition and debate, rather than fear it. The Americans have always lived with opposition, even since the Bush years so dreadfully widened the chasm between the two more-or-less 50% parties representing the conservative-militaristic thinking that gave us Iraq and Afghanistan, and the democratic-socialistic thinking that is in power now.



Even the present power structure in the USA is a synthesis of the capitalism-versus-socialism dialectic. Without government intervention, much more harm might have been done to the US, both domestically and globally, although diehard capitalists continue to oppose such actions.

The first non-white president in American history has in himself become a terrific challenge opposing the somewhat racial attitudes of not too long ago in American history.

Do we not applaud Obama for attempting to purify American attitudes and prejudices? And may Allah

SWT guide both our leaders to a clean, productive, and mutually enlightening relationship now and in the future.

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