

Najib's GMM Idea Has Potential To Catch On Around The World

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By Manik Mehta

NEW YORK, Oct 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who made a passionate pitch for his pet project - the Global Movement of the Moderates (GMM) - during his various engagements recently in New York, could succeed in unleashing the dynamics of this idea which could catch on in many regions of the world, including the world's only superpower, the United States of America.

While public opinion in the United States is already characterised by a clear rejection of extremism - the administration can ill-afford to ignore public opinion - the administration of President Barack Obama has vacillated and changed positions at times in regard to dealing with religious extremism.

But Najib's idea of moderation, which could appeal to both the Western world and the majority of Muslims - the latter feel they are getting a bad name because a few extremists are using Islam to carry out their violent agenda -- could provide what is described as a "middle path" between the two extreme positions.

According to sources, the GMM would strive for tolerance, social and economic justice, in addition to moderation.

"Most extremists are fringe elements and do not command universal support," an American guest at the Council of Foreign Relations, where Najib delivered his lecture on the GMM on Sept 26, told Bernama on condition of anonymity.

"Moderation could work as a magical sponge and suck in the broad majority of people who are moderate and reject any form of violence. This constituency of people could get a strong impetus emanating from the prime minister's (Najib's) initiative," he said.

Najib's entourage during his just-concluded U.S. visit also included a number of Malaysian experts who are pushing the GMM concept. They were here not only to feel the pulse of the local organisations - indeed, there are U.S. organisations which also have similar ideas as the GMM - but also to find some form of cooperation with the like-minded.

Dr Azhari Karim, a retired Malaysian ambassador who had diplomatic postings in a number of European countries including Germany, Romania and Spain and later also taught at Universiti Sains Malaysia, joined the GMM Foundation and visited New York as a member of Najib's entourage.

"We are trying to link with the USA. The GMM would include people of all faiths, but our goal will be to work towards moderation and thus promote harmony and greater understanding among people of diverse faiths and cultures," he told Bernama on the sidelines of Najib's official visit.

Indeed, the GMM will pursue what is called a "Track 2" course, working as an intermediary between the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

"We want to carve a global role for this movement. But at some point, we should be able to discuss and seek solutions for flashpoints and crises worldwide.

"We would like to offer alternatives to the kind of reactions we see worldwide," Azhari said, recalling that the former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who had visited Malaysia after attending the Asean Summit two years ago in Hanoi, had described the GMM as a "brave new idea".

President Obama, who will be visiting Malaysia to attend the inauguration of the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) this month, could also find the GMM theme of interest.

The GES is being held this year in Kuala Lumpur and is the third successive such summit; the first and second of the events held in Washington DC and Dubai, respectively.

According to some members of his visiting entourage in New York, Najib is also expected to discuss the GMM theme with President Obama during the latter's visit to Kuala Lumpur.

"We will first create GMM chapters in Asean and then spread out to other countries of the world," Azhari said.

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