

A concept made simple, but did some get it?

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■ Comment by Wan Hamidi Hamid

ISLAM Hadhari is not a blank cheque for ultra conservatism. Islam Hadhari is not a blank cheque for permissiveness. Islam Hadhari promotes tolerance of other religions. Islam Hadhari is a reminder to Muslims that Islam is more than just literal laws and prohibitions.

So said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during his presidential address to party delegates. Using clear language and relating it to recent examples in Malaysia, he broke down the idea of Islam Hadhari for the common man.

Yet, judging from several speakers after him, much work still needs to be done to explain this idea to party members.

"Islam Hadhari is an approach. It is a philosophy that reminds Muslims that our faith unequivocally requires us to succeed in this world.

"We perpetuate a great disservice to Islam if we reject development, if we are obsessed with conflict and if we live in ignorance.

"We have an obligation to demonstrate Islam's beauty and perfection by being a respected civilisation, not one that is viewed with disdain and suspicion."

Just in case he came across as too philosophical, Abdullah provided Malaysians with some examples of what did not constitute Islam Hadhari.

"Long accepted cultural practices that we have adhered to — such as sending greetings or wishing another Malaysian in conjunction with their own festival — are now damned as taboo.

"Have we reached such a level of intolerance? The joint open house is now condemned. When did we become ultra-conservative? This is not Islam Hadhari."

Abdullah explained that such a view threatened the unique tolerance for which Malaysian Muslims were renowned.

"We must not and cannot allow this. It will not make us more Islamic if we do not greet another person on the occasion of their celebration, just as my faith is not shaken when I go to a Deepavali or Christmas open house," he added.

For the Prime Minister, these narrow-minded people had a skewed agenda: To see Malaysia torn apart and to fail as a multi-racial, multi-religious nation.

"This is not Islam. For example, so many SMSes have been sent out, claiming mass baptisms of Muslims and the purported for-

mation of a Malay Christian Association. There are even those who claim — without any proof — that hundreds of Malay Muslims have become apostates," he said, urging party members to verify information rather than jumping to conclusions.

He would have been surprised to hear Kedah Umno's Senator Tajul Urus Mohd Zain urge the authorities to take a hardline approach against national solo mariner Datuk Azhar Mansor — the target of a vicious SMS alleging that he was no longer a Muslim.

The Kedah politician insisted: "If a person is accused of being an apostate, shouldn't he come forward to explain to us? The Islamic Development Department (Jakim) must do something. My suggestion is that if a Malay wishes to leave his religion, he should seek an audience with a Sultan.

"If he insists on leaving Islam, he must be beheaded. There is no Christian Malay in Malaysia. Malays are 100 per cent Muslim. There is no compromise on this."

The uncompromising stand of Tajul Urus sits awkwardly with the Umno president's wish that such "incitement whips many Malays into a frenzy because we do not have a culture of seeking to verify

what we hear, preferring to believe everything we are told. It is such unfounded claims which lead to many becoming angry and even militant".

"Let me be clear — Islam Hadhari is not a blank cheque to bring about conservative revivalism in this country. Neither is it a blank cheque for permissiveness.

"While I will protect Islam's position and the role of the Syariah courts from being undermined, I will also ensure that no one tries to hijack Islam in Malaysia in order to breed intolerance and hatred."

Kelantan delegate Datuk Mohd Alwi Che Ahmad also seemed caught up with what the president was concerned about — too much focus on prohibitions. The Ketereh Member of Parliament complained that there was too much entertainment on TV during the recent Hari Raya celebration.

"Aidilfitri is a form of worship (*ibadat*). It is not about having entertainment," he said, adding that Islam Hadhari should be enforced to address the alleged problem.

The positions taken by Alwi and Tajul Urus were meant as a motion of support to Abdullah's keynote address. The question is: Did they tally with the Umno president's explanation of Islam Hadhari?