



Ikim views

Multidimensional justice and unity

FOR every three Muslims in Malaysia, there are two others who follow different faiths and beliefs.

The Muslim community of over 18 million people co-exists with more than 11 million followers of other faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Chinese beliefs, Sikhism and others.

Inter-faith co-existence is, thus, imperative with regard to Malaysia's national unity.

Our community's success thus far consists of gaining independence from the imperialist powers of Siam, Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain and Japan, in maintaining its sovereignty, and in progressing in science, technology and the economy.

Since independence, Malaysia has achieved the best economic record in Asia, with Gross Domestic Product growing an average of 6.5% for almost 50 years, with the economy expanding in the new, innovative sectors of science and commerce.

All these reflect that, to a certain extent, there is social integration and unity in Malaysia, which consists of, among others, adequately understanding other faiths and beliefs, positive perception, and low level of prejudice towards other adherents.

In a 2013-14 survey, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Ikim found that firstly, 95% of respondents scored high, reflecting a high level of basic knowledge in their religion as well

Our social integration includes understanding others with different faiths and having a positive perception of them.

as of others'.

Secondly, the majority of respondents had a positive perception of followers of other faiths: more than 95% in the peninsula and Sarawak, and 63.8% in Sabah.

Thirdly, more than 80% had a relatively low level of prejudice.

While there is successful social integration, unity can always be gradually enhanced.

Such success is largely because, since the fight for independence, the vision of the country is to safeguard the interests of all, including the minorities.

There is no compulsion in terms of religion, culture, and in learning and speaking other languages.

However, given Malaysia's diverse races and tongues in a relatively young country, for the sake of social integrity and robust communication, the Constitution of the Federation enshrines that there should be one national language, the Malay language.

Another significant national document that envisions the future of Malaysia, the Rukun Negara, emphasises the following three aspects.

First, being democratic in politics; second, fairness and justice in economics; and, third, acceptance of the fact that Malaysia inherits rich and

colourful multicultural traditions.

Disunity looms large on the horizon, if the contrary happens.

First, absolutist government: with no check and balance, socio-political authorities will be inclined to oppress the weak and powerless.

This results in disunity between the powerful authorities and the vulnerable and the defenceless.

Throughout the Quran, God condemns all political power obtained through aggression or criminal violence, as it is bound to give rise to oppression, suffering and moral corruption in society.

One such verse is, "Indeed, Pharaoh tyrannised over the land and divided the people thereof into different classes; he oppressed one class of them ... for he was one of those who spread corruption on earth".

It is such a Pharaonic claim to absolute power that is the overriding destructive force against human civilisation, whereby "he has transgressed all bounds of what is right" or the limits of the golden mean confirmed by divine law and sound rationality.

Moreover, God commands through Prophet Muhammad, in a hadith, "O My servants! I have forbidden Myself from oppressing

anyone, and have made it (oppression) unlawful for you, too. Thus, you must not oppress each other."

The second cause of social disunity is a corrupt economic system, when the rich stockpile national wealth at the expense of the poor and the helpless.

A just circulation of wealth is indeed emphasised throughout the Quran: "wealth should not circulate solely among the rich".

While promoting an ethical social order, God severely denounces the condition of economic disequilibrium. Fazlur Rahman, in his work, *Major Themes of the Quran*, writes that gross economic disparities are most persistently criticised because it is the most difficult issue to remedy at the heart of social discord.

Even if the wealthy rightfully earn something, they cannot spend it just as they wish. Not all wealth earned rightfully belongs to them; the needy, the indigent and the deprived also have a right to it.

God rebukes the act of hoarding wealth and heartless uncharitableness. The Quran refers to those who hoard their wealth without spending anything on righteous causes: "those who amass gold and silver and spend not in the way of God and thus in public welfare".

Those who lead selfish lives also have been severely reprimanded. Even as they perform religious rituals, they fail the test of "little acts of neighbourly help, the thousand little courtesies and kindnesses of daily life, the supply of needs which cost little but mean much".

God censures their hypocrisy in the Quran: "Have you observed him who gives lie to religion? It is he who treats the orphans (the helpless) with contempt and feels no urge to feed the needy. Woe, then, to those who pray, yet are neglectful of their prayers - those who pray for show and deny all assistance [to their fellow-men]."

The third cause of disunity is an intolerant and narrow perception of cultural diversity.

A fair and just appreciation of diverse cultural elements, as outlined in Malaysia's National Cultural Policy since 1971, must take into account Malay and Islamic culture without any chauvinistic elements whatsoever.

Last, the fourth cause of disunity is if the national language - the soul of our nation - is neglected in cultivating "national identity" even as it is the mother tongue of around 60% of the population.

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