

Trends in Southeast Asia Series: 4(2003)

Political and Security Outlook 2003: Islam: The Challenge from Extremist Interpretations

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THE FUNDAMENTALIST CHALLENGE IN MALAYSIA

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ISLAM: THE CHALLENGE FROM EXTREMIST INTERPRETATIONS

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These edited papers were originally prepared in December 2002 and delivered on 7 January 2003 at the 2003 Regional Outlook Forum organized by ISEAS. The Forum addressed the regional outlook for the year 2003.

Published by
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 119614

E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg
World Wide Web: <http://www.iseas.edu.sg/pub.html>

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ISSN 0219-3213

April 2003

About the Speaker

Zainah Anwar is the Executive Director of Sisters in Islam (SIS), a non-governmental organisation working on the rights of Muslim women within the framework of Islam. SIS, founded in 1988, is at the forefront of the women's movement, which seeks to end discrimination against women in the name of religion. She is also a member of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia. She received her education both in Malaysia and abroad, including the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in the fields of international relations and journalism. She has an impressive professional record, having worked previously as the Chief Programme Officer, Political Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, London; Senior Analyst, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, KL; and Political and Diplomatic Writer, The New Straits Times, KL. Her book, Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among Students has become a standard reference text in the study of Islam in Malaysia.

THE FUNDAMENTALIST CHALLENGE IN MALAYSIA

As requested by the organisers, this presentation will focus on the challenge posed by PAS to the development of moderate Islam in Malaysia.

The 1999 General Elections and a Fragmented Malay Society

Malay-Muslim politics in Malaysia today are mired in many uncertainties as UMNO and PAS grapple to search for an equilibrium to meet the competing demands of a very fragmented electorate — those who demand a democratic, secular, modern Malaysia, those who demand an Islamic state with shari'ah laws, and those who demand a democratic, modern state but imbued with Islamic value.

The 1999 general elections, held at a time when Malaysia was caught up in political turmoil following the sacking of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, saw PAS making historic inroads, especially in the northern parts of the country. Many Malaysians have been alarmed by the PAS gains and the prospect of intensified Islamisation of Malaysia.

A PAS Makeover

In the run-up to the last general elections, PAS embarked on a major makeover of its image and strategies. It pushed for the formation of a multi-ethnic Alternative Front, bringing together Keadilan, the new party led by Anwar's wife, Dr Wan Azizah, the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party and the left-leaning People's Party. It targeted the non-Muslims as a constituency that must be won over if PAS ever hoped to achieve its dream of ruling Malaysia. It adopted the language of human rights, freedom and democracy to tap into the groundswell of protest against the mistreatment of Anwar Ibrahim by what was seen as an authoritarian government.

Thus in talks given to the non-Muslim communities, interviews given to the foreign Press, and in the English language section of Harakah, PAS leaders, in particular its late president, Fadzil Noor, downplayed the party's commitment to an Islamic state and enforcement of the shari'ah as the law of the land. For the first time ever, PAS talked about Islam through the language of democracy and human rights, respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, the right to live free from fear and threat, protecting the rights of all communities, etc. This is an Islamic image alien to PAS in its campaign for the hearts and minds of the Malays in its traditional constituencies in the Malay heartland.

To me, these pronouncements of newfound democratic principles and ideals constitute a breathtaking contradiction of PAS policies and actions in the name of Islam over the past 20 years. While many among the newfound supporters of PAS, especially among the educated middle-class justify their support for this Islamist party on those grounds, an analysis of facts shows this change of image is nothing but rhetoric for political expediency. I say this because:

- For several years in the 1990s — the latest was July 1999 — PAS, through Ustaz Hadi, the radical Chief Minister of Terengganu, had tried to introduce a private member's bill in Parliament demanding the death penalty for apostasy. This cannot be seen as an action by a party that supports human rights and fundamental liberties.
- PAS in 1993 adopted the Hudud law in Kelantan, which provided for draconian punishment such as stoning to death and cutting off of hands and feet. It is also unjust in other ways: it discriminates against women and non-Muslims by disqualifying these two categories of citizens (thus disqualifying three quarters of Malaysian citizens) as witnesses; it presumes that a pregnant unmarried woman is guilty of illicit sex (*zina*), which enables pregnant rape victims to be charged for *zina*; and it imposes the death penalty for apostasy. Haji Hadi and the current Deputy Chief Minister of Kelantan declared in 1993 that those who opposed the Hudud law were apostates and therefore under the Hudud law should be sentenced to death.
- PAS in Kelantan also fines women for not covering their heads, demands that business premises and cinemas have separate lines and seating arrangements for men and women, bans women from performing on stage, and bans several Malay performing arts it deemed unIslamic, even though they have been a rich part of the Malay cultural heritage for centuries.
- Even after the 1999 general elections, the obscurantist and intolerant mindset that rules PAS still dominates. The Terengganu state government under the leadership of the radical Hadi Awang passed two

controversial laws last year. First is the Hudud law of Terengganu, which was in its original draft even more draconian than the Kelantan law. As could be expected, it grossly discriminates against women by disqualifying women as eyewitnesses and by assuming that an unmarried woman who is pregnant or has delivered a baby has committed *zina* (adultery/illicit sex).

What caused an uproar, however, was the provision in the original draft which provided that a woman who reports rape would be charged for *qazaf* (slandorous accusation) and flogged 80 lashes if she was unable to prove the rape (through four Muslim male eyewitnesses). Everyone knows that it is impossible to produce four pious male Muslims as eyewitnesses to rape, except it seems the drafters of the law. The outrage forced the PAS government to amend the bill to allow for circumstantial evidence to prove a rape allegation, but the burden of proof still remains on the woman to substantiate her claim.

- This misogynist and medieval mindset is further seen in the amendments made to the Shariah Criminal Offences Enactment. It is now a crime in Terengganu if a woman exposes any part of her body that arouses passion in a man, it is a crime if a Muslim does not perform his/her five daily prayers, it is a crime if an unmarried woman leaves home without the permission of her guardian.
- Very significantly, too, PAS has remained deafeningly silent on developments in Iran. If PAS is truly committed to reform, principles of democracy, human rights, civil society, and freedom of expression as its leaders proclaim in the English pages of Harakah, in interviews with the foreign press, western diplomats, and in its dialogue with the Chinese community, why then is reformist President Khatami of Iran inconsequential, successive Iranian elections which saw landslide victories of reformist candidates aligned to Khatami a non-event, and the struggle and debate in Iran between the hard-liners and the reformists a non-issue in the public talks of PAS leaders and in the pages of Harakah? Where are those so called moderate forces within PAS steering the party into a more democratic course?

The obsession with the Hudud law, morality and control over women's bodies displays a mindset frozen in medieval jurisprudence. It points to a mindset that does not have the ability or willingness to consider that the application of Islamic teachings in the 21st century has necessarily to change given the changing times and circumstances. Justice in the 10th century could have been served and could have been acceptable by the society of that time through the cutting off of hands and heads, but

not in the 21st century. While justice remains the eternal principle of Islam, what justice means and how it is implemented has to change to meet the ever evolving international and community standards. Unfortunately very few ulama, who demand that they have the exclusive right to interpret Islam and codify the teachings of the religion into law, are able to meet this challenge.

PAS' rhetorical commitment to democracy and human rights must be challenged by facts.

If PAS has genuinely changed its Islamic ideology to one that recognises differences of opinion, fundamental liberties and democratic principles, and the social conditions and realities of contemporary Malaysian society, then it could truly present itself as a democratic alternative to this very flawed National Front government. But I doubt this because the language that PAS speaks at the village level in its traditional constituencies and even in the Malay pages of Harakah, the language of so many of its leaders and fanatical supporters is still one of an intolerance and extremist Islam. Its position on benchmark issues in progressive Islam such as women's rights, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, imposition of hudud law and shari'ah law, music and culture, interaction between men and women, the imperative of ijtihad (reinterpretation of the Qur'an to deal with changing times and circumstances) or the right to question and challenge the views and interpretations of the ulama, remains one of obscurantism and intolerance.

Their vision of Islam makes PAS no different from other hard-line Islamic parties and movements in other parts of the Muslim world for whom Islam seems to mean nothing more than a set of punitive legal precepts, stripped of its ethical values and worldview of justice.

UMNO's Conundrum

Where does this leave UMNO? The dramatic loss of Malay support in the last elections, has left UMNO grappling with new challenges for which it still has found no clear answers.

The conundrum that UMNO is in is that its leadership does not have the machinery nor the intellectual capital to deliver a progressive vision of Islam in governing Malaysia. First, for over 16 years, UMNO depended largely on Anwar and

the ABIM machinery to deliver the support of the Islamist constituency to UMNO. When Anwar was sacked, this support base that he had assiduously cultivated turned against the government and became the core of Keadilan. They combined forces with PAS and its allies, the university-based students' associations, and together they formed a formidable force against UMNO.

Second, the government's own Islamic Affairs Department and the State-level Islamic Departments are dominated by traditionalist ulama. Most of these ulama, certainly at the personal level, if not at the official level, do not share Dr Mahathir's progressive vision of Islam. In fact there is little to differentiate between most of the government's ulama and the Pas ulama. They went to the same schools and the same universities and graduated with the same obscurantist ideas on issues such as women's rights, dress and modesty, *ijtihad*, freedom of expression, punishment for apostasy, Hudud laws, etc.

These ulama wield tremendous influence throughout society as they conduct religious classes in government offices, at mosques and *suraus*, in public talks over radio and television, in *ceramahs* in private homes and most importantly in the education of young minds in schools and universities.

The conservative message they spread churns out year after year fresh fodder more inclined towards an Islam as represented by PAS rather than UMNO, but ironically delivered via the government machinery.

Third, in responding to the PAS challenge, and in trying to prove its Islamic credentials, UMNO has become hostage to the PAS agenda and framework of Islam because of its own dismal failure to deliver on a truly alternative progressive, democratic Islam. So many among UMNO leaders concede to the PAS yardstick of what is Islamic and what is not, out of ignorance, laziness, or fear of being attacked as anti-Islam should their position differ from the mainstream conservative stand. Moreover, pushing for a progressive Islam is a double-edged sword for a party with values that often are incongruent with the ethical democratic values of progressive Islam.

UMNO's Islamic agenda has placed the party in a weak, vulnerable and exposed position vis-à-vis PAS. It engages in an Islamic discourse on PAS terms, and has allowed PAS to define what in political terms Islam is and what it is not. UMNO

that chooses to play a catch-up game that it can never win. Unlike Indonesia, where the leaders of the two mass-based Islamic movements have declared that Indonesia should not be an Islamic state, nor should it be governed by Shariah law, the Government of Malaysia cannot readily depend on such a public constituency to support any similar declaration. It sees the political costs as too risky a price to pay.

What Islam, Whose Islam?

This race to measure one's piety and Islamic credentials based on one's dressing, the status and control of women in one's society, the severity of punishment one imposes on those who transgress the teachings of the religion, is a reflection of the reality in many Muslim societies today when religion is transformed into an ideology for political struggle and a source of legitimacy.

This is dangerous to democratic governance. In giving in to the demands of the religious ideologues, the government continually legitimises them and becomes hostage to the PAS agenda and framework of Islam.

For example in 2000, attempts were made to introduce the Islamic Aqidah (Faith) Protection Bill which provides for a one-year mandatory detention in a Faith Rehabilitation Centre for those who attempt to leave Islam. The pressure to punish Muslims who leave Islam came not just from PAS and its supporters, but also from UMNO members and leaders. They could find no enlightened and persuasive answer to the PAS charge in the Malay villages that this Government could not be regarded as Islamic as it provided no punishment for those who leave Islam, and yet would fine a citizen RM500 just for throwing a cigarette butt on the market floor. PAS, as the true Islamic party, had already introduced the death penalty for apostasy in its Hudud law, but this unIslamic National Front government takes no action against Muslims who leave Islam.

Be it in the area of fundamental liberties or women's rights, the tendency displayed by the religious authorities, whether in PAS or in UMNO, is often to codify the most conservative opinion into law. For example, traditionally there are three juristic positions on apostasy. First, the orthodox view of death to all apostates. The second view prescribes the death penalty only if apostasy is accompanied by rebellion against the community and its legitimate leadership, which really means treason. The

third view holds that even though apostasy is a great sin, it is not a capital offence in Islam. Therefore a personal change of faith merits no punishment. This is the official position of al-Azhar University, recently adopted by its progressive Grand Sheikh, Dr Mohammed Sayed Tantawi.

However, PAS in its vision of Islam has chosen the most extremist juristic opinion to codify into law, death. The Government's religious authorities had chosen what it felt was a compromise position: one-year compulsory rehabilitation instead of death. If at the end of the detention period, the person still refuses to repent, then the judge will declare that the person is no longer a Muslim and order his release. However, one-year mandatory detention is no consolation to freedom of religion. The person's rights and fundamental liberties have been violated. If he is married, his marriage will be dissolved and the judge will determine his obligations or liabilities under Islamic Family Law.

And yet, the Qur'an is explicit in its recognition of freedom of religion, and there exists within the Islamic juristic heritage a position that supports freedom of religion. And yet when the religious authorities codify Islamic teachings into law, it is seldom that they would choose the most enlightened opinion.

Civil society then plays a very important role in providing alternative opinions within Islam that uphold the religion's eternal principles of justice, equality, freedom and dignity, in expanding the public space for citizens to engage in debate and in discussing benchmark issues in Islam, and finally, in vigorously challenging any attempt to silence us through fear and intimidation.

Therefore the struggle for the progressive voice of Islam is necessarily also a struggle for democracy. For without the democratic space for citizens to exercise their right to freedom of expression, then the struggle for freedom of religion, freedom of choice, justice and equality within the Islamic framework cannot be sustained.

The Future

I have great faith that Malaysians are in the end a very pragmatic, resilient and moderate people. I think PAS has reached its peak in the 1999 general elections and I would like to dare to hope that the development of a more progressive Islam in Malaysia would only grow, albeit slowly. I say this for several reasons:

- Post September 11 and especially since the Bali bombings, many moderate Muslims and the non-Muslims of Malaysia have woken up to the dangers posed to democracy, peace and stability by Islamist politics. The PAS call for jihad against the United States and a trade boycott against one of Malaysia's largest trading partners made many Malaysians wonder the damage PAS could do to the country were it in power. This finally propelled the DAP to leave the BA coalition, as the haemorrhage of Chinese support it suffered in the 1999 elections was becoming untenable for its political survival post September 11. Thus what could have developed into a viable multi-ethnic alternative to the dominance of Barisan Nasional has collapsed.
- The gains made by PAS in the 1999 general elections now give it a national profile as never before. This means that it now comes under national and also international scrutiny, a spotlight that it had escaped for some 50 years of its existence. The larger Malaysian and international constituency "discovered" PAS in 1998 at a time when it adopted the universal language of human rights, democracy, justice and freedom. But this rhetoric has been undermined by its call for jihad, its adoption of the Hudud law, its obsession with morality and women and the evils of music and infidel culture, its position on freedom of religion and freedom of expression.
- The opening of the public space for debate on Islam and Islamic issues in the past few years augurs well for democratic politics and the development of a more progressive Islam in Malaysia. The debate over the Terengganu Hudud Bill, the attempt by the Ulama Association of Malaysia to charge me and five others for insulting Islam, and the Government's attempt to introduce a Protection of Faith bill, have opened the public space for a more rational and better informed discussion on Islamic issues. In all cases, the proponents had to retreat in the face of public outcry. Currently, the polygamous Chief Minister of Perlis has opened another space for public debate on polygamy and the women's groups are mobilising to start a campaign against this practice, which has been so abused by Muslim men in Malaysia.
- Another hope is the strengthening of civil society in Malaysia propelled by the political upheaval of the past three years. The strengthening and persistence of NGOs in fighting for more freedom and rights on the basis of respect for democracy, human rights and rule of law, can only strengthen the democratic culture in Malaysia.
- A new Prime Minister in October with family and academic credentials in Islam, and yet is progressive, democratic, consultative and multi-racial in outlook will hopefully help to transform Malaysian politics to be more inclusive and democratic.

About the Speaker

Ulil Abashar-Abdalla graduated from the Faculty of Islamic Law, Muhammad bin Saud University, Indonesia. Born in Central Java, he spent 15 years in Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) in his hometown of Pati. He is concurrently occupying several positions in his professional capacity. These include, Head of the Liberal Islam Network, Project Director of Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) and Head of Research and Human Resource Development Institute of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation with a following of about 40 million. He is a regular contributor to several dailies and magazines in Indonesia, including Tempo Magazine. He has also published a book, The Private and The Public in Indonesian Islamic Discourse (1998).

ISLAM: THE CHALLENGE FROM EXTREMIST INTERPRETATIONS

I am going to share with you the challenge of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia. Last November I produced a column in the daily *Kompas*, one of the biggest dailies in Indonesia, about the imperative of refreshing Islamic understanding. The column has raised a lot of controversies and polemics, but what surprised me was that this column earned me a death penalty, or death *fatwa*.

With the downfall of the New Order in Indonesia, we come into realisation that amongst the biggest problem we are facing as Muslims in the country, is the shrinking space for discussion and exchange of thoughts. I am going to talk about this problem.

One of the positive legacies of the New Order era was the establishment of *pancasila* as a state ideology. A lot of Muslims criticised the imposition of *pancasila* as a single ideology for the people during the New Order's time. But now all these people and I realise that living in a plural and multi-ethnic state requires a common denominator, a common ideology that glues people together in one country. With the decline of the New Order government, we suffer from a lack of a unified ideology that holds people together. Also with this decline has come a vacuum of ideology and this vacuum has led to the emergence of radicalism in Indonesia. Correspondingly I interpret the emergence of radical ideologists as partly an effort to fill this void of ideology. The challenge for the Muslims in Indonesia is therefore to revive the notion of an ideology of a common denominator, one that can sustain the plural state for all citizens.

The shrinking public space for the debate and discussion of issues is a product of this problem, the product of the decline of ideology. Dr Rohan Gunaratna's presentation was interesting, particularly his revelations on *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) as a

network, as an ideology that is still intact. Until this network as an ideology is dismantled, I think the threat of terrorism still looms large in the region. However, I would like to add to Dr. Gunaratna's explanation.

I think we should make a distinction between radicalism and fundamentalism. Radicalism is an ideology that tries to combine a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam with violence. More specifically, radicalism is an effort to combine the ideology of a particular understanding of Islam (an ideology based on selective and a literal reading of Islam and violence). What we should deal with seriously is how to challenge and to combat radicalism, which always uses violence as a methodology. Fundamentalism is a problem but not as serious as radicalism. What Muslims should do in eradicating radicalism is to open up, to widen the space for discussion. Recently there has been a debate in Indonesia about whether or not the *Ngruki pesantran* should be closed down. This debate was a result of a proposal by some military commanders for it to be closed based on evidence that it actively promotes terrorism.

Personally speaking, I do not agree with this proposal. Indonesians have suffered for a long time under the previous authoritarian government. What Indonesians need now is an open system, a democratic system, in which all Indonesians can express their aspirations and can establish their own organisations. Therefore the proposal to close down *Ngruki Pesantran* will be contrary to the spirit of this new system that we need.

I always say to my fellow Muslims in Indonesia that Muslims should be free to express ideas, or to express any interpretation of Islam as long as they do not condone violence and terrorism. I feel that what Muslims need to do now is to challenge the use of jihad as the ideology for justification of violence. The cornerstone of the radical movements in Indonesia is the use of jihad as a doctrine. It is a very new development in the history of Islamic movement. Of course during Soeharto's time there was an effort by some groups in Indonesia to use jihad as an ideology, but it failed. Since the transition to democracy in 1998, there has been an upsurge of radical movements and one such movement is based on the use of jihad as a doctrine. I think jihad as a new ideology to justify the use of violence is very much influenced by Osama bin Laden's understanding of Islam. Therefore Osama is a

central figure responsible for the emergence of radical Islamic movements that believe in the legitimacy of employing violence to meet their objectives.

I would like to share with you the different interpretation of jihad in Islam. According to mainstream Muslim understanding (this is the conservative understanding of jihad), jihad is a defensive mechanism. Jihad is justifiable when a Muslim is attacked and needs to defend himself. But Osama bin Laden, has turned jihad into an offensive ideology. Jihad therefore has become a tool to justify violence. With Osama, jihad means two things — jihad is an offensive ideology against America as a country and against the Jews as a people. This is a very new interpretation of jihad that I have never come across in Islamic history. It is obvious that this unilateral reinterpretation is very dangerous.

A lot of people here have talked about *wahabism* as a root cause of radicalism. I beg to differ. *Wahabism* has been around for a long time. It is not a way of interpreting Islam that emerged concurrently with the rise of Osama bin Laden as a radicalist. Of course *wahabism represents fundamentalism*. Saudi Arabia as a government is based on *wahabist* ideology. I think in this case Saudi Arabia is no different from Indonesia, or from China. Every state needs an ideology, and *wahabism* has been adopted as an ideology in Saudi Arabia. The problem is that *wahabism*, has been reinterpreted in a new manner that has allowed its mutation into a radical political ideology.

A lot of people think that Islamist movements like *ikhwânu l-muslimîn*, or the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, are the inspiration for the radicalism in the Muslim world today. The words of Islamists such as Sayyed Qutb and Hassan Al-Banna were often quoted as sources of inspiration for radicalism in the Muslim world. Actually *ikhwânu l-muslimîn* is a combination of *wahabism* as a school of Islamic thought and the use of *wahabism* itself as an ideology. So I would say that *ikhwânu l-muslimîn* is *wahabism-plus*. Of course *wahabism* tries to understand Islam in a literal manner, that is, it is fundamentalist in its worldview. However, *wahabism* as such does not pose a serious threat. But what concerns me is *wahabism* being turned into a political ideology in the hands of people like Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyed Qutb. Therefore there is a clear distinction between fundamentalism and radicalism (terrorism) and we should be clear in this distinction.

Wahabism, maybe may be an inspiration for fundamentalism but it has two different facets to it — *wahabism* as tool for Islamic understanding and *wahabism* as a political ideology. Hence, what is dangerous for the Muslim society is when *wahabism* is manipulated as a political ideology that justifies the use of offensive jihad. Osama bin Laden who subscribes to *wahabism* has been responsible for its bastardisation, making offensive jihad an integral part of this new ideology.

Back to the challenge of radicalism in Indonesia. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, established a body called the *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI), a council of Indonesia's mujahidin. Ba'asyir ascribes to the same ideology as Osama such that ideologically, jihad justifies violence. Another problem that we are facing in the country is the debate over the implementation of Islamic Sha'ariah as the law of the land. This problem is also present in Malaysia. In Indonesia this proposal is actually not supported by the Muslim society in general and this is evidenced by the poor showing of the Islamist parties in the last general elections. They only won less than five per cent of votes. Therefore, the people do not support this proposal for the implementation of Sha'ariah as the law of the land. However, the new ideology being promoted by people like Ba'asyir is gaining more sympathy among some Muslims. Not surprisingly this acceptance has also led to sympathy for the implementation of Islamic Sha'ariah. But I believe that at least for the next ten years it will be very difficult for the Islamic parties, to win substantive political power through elections and so change the Indonesian constitution from a secular one to that based on the Sha'ariah. However, we cannot take this for granted especially given the limited public space for discourse.

I mentioned before that when I had published a column on the imperative of refreshing our understanding of Islam, some clerics had declared a *fatwa*, a death *fatwa* on me. Such actions undermine the spirit of and space for discussion. And when such space is narrowed and radical groups determine the agenda for that space, then we are in danger. For example, the people who promote the adoption of the Sha'ariah as the basis for the Indonesian constitution, dominate the public space, that is they set the agenda and they also narrow it at the same time by branding those opposed to their agenda as anti-Islam.

I am still optimistic that Indonesia will still subscribe to the moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam in the foreseeable future due to two factors. One is the existence of such moderate Islamic organisations like *Nadlادتul Ulama* and *Muhamadiyah*. Almost sixty per cent of the Muslim population are members of these two organisations, thereby ensuring wide subscription to a moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam. As such, I think this is an Islamic or political guarantee.

Second, we have inherited a good educational system from the New Order government. We have thirteen Islamic universities throughout the country called the Islamic State of Islamic Studies (EIEN). This is a bastion of liberal and moderate Islam in the country. Thus, with the existence of organisations like Muhammadiyah and Nadlادتul Ulama, and also moderate Islamic universities spread out across the country, I am optimistic that moderate Islam will prevail and be predominant in the country. Of course the challenge of radicalism is real, but as long as the Muslims have a space for discussion to challenge radical views, I think there is hope and optimism that moderate Islam and a plural Islamic society will continue to be synonymous with Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

Question

We all have been talking about dialogues between the so-called moderate Islam and the so-called traditionalists. To me the problem is, they are not talking on the same frequency, they tend to have pride in their own concepts without having the needs to learn each other's concepts. There are two main critics towards the so-called moderates and the so-called liberal Islam, the first one is that they really lack a sense of spirituality. Religion is something spiritual, of course, so this in turn would create a dry interpretation of Islam, that is the first critique. The second is that these moderates are not considerate.

My question is, how then, the moderates, the so-called liberals can reach them with their own language, their own systems, with their own minds, because I think this would create a dialogue in the same frequency.

Ulil Abshar-Abdalla

The breeding ground for radicalism in Indonesia is secular universities. This is in the opposite of the explanation being introduced by some experts that radicalism is breeding in the traditional Islamic institutions. From my experience I have a lot of hard debate not in the traditional Islamic institution but "my enemies in ideas come from the secular universities". That is the reason why I focus my works these days in winning the minds and hearts of the students in the secular universities. This is the challenge. This is again, a result of the decline of the state ideology. I think despite all criticisms directed to the New Orders time as an authoritarian government, I think the positive thing that we inherit from the past regime was the establishment of the "secular education" based on the secular ideology. With the revival of Islam as a new identity in 1998 onward, there is a strong tendency in the secular universities to adopt a very exclusive identity and abandoning the secular ideology of *pancasila*. I think we need the new system of education that could defeat the secular and could defeat an inclusive mindset there because otherwise we are suffering again and again from the

religious exclusivism in the country. The problem is not how to be in the similar frequency, how to have dialogues on the same level. No. The problem is that the education system is now shrinking because it suffers from the inclusive orientation.

Zainah Anwar

To answer the question on spirituality. I think it is a bit rich for these people to say that the moderate groups and the liberals lack spirituality. What is so spiritual about embarking on jihad, about having a hudud law that stone people to death and cut off hands and feet, about discriminating against women? All these claims, accusations, charges, criticisms are really nothing but strategies used by the radical groups, by the extremist groups to basically again shrink the public space for debate. Basically to maintain what they see as their monopoly to speak about Islam and deny civil society and the rest of us who don't cover up, who don't speak Arabic, who did not go to Al-Ahzar to speak about Islam. It is important that when such arguments are used, what are your credentials to speak about Islam. You don't have an Islamic degree, you are not covered up, you are westernised, that this needs to be challenged, it cannot go unchallenged. Because so many of the people in the Islamic movements are seculars. They don't have degrees from Al-Ahzar, they don't speak Arabic, and yet their credential to call for an Islamic state, to call for Sha'ariah laws is never questioned. Many of them are third-rate engineering graduates from third-rate American universities. And yet nobody questions their right to speak about Islam because the Islam that they voiced is the Islam that

Question

Dr Solomon said that the struggle that will dominate world politics for the next several decades is issue of the Muslim world coming to terms with itself and with the rest of the international community and he further said that the challenge of the non-Muslims is to be supportive of the forces of moderation and tolerance in that world and to work with friendly countries to isolate and neutralise those who seek a violent clash of civilisations. I know quite a few moderate Muslims in Southeast Asia who would regard open endorsement by the United States and outsiders as the kiss of death. They would think it tends to discredit them and undermine their work. I would

like to ask Zainah and Ulil would you and your organisations welcome support from the United States, other governments, non-government organisations and the denigration of your opponents, the extremists. Would you regard that as a help or hindrance in your work?

Zainah Anwar

That is a tough one. I don't welcome open support, I don't welcome open arms from the US government or US organisations because it is a double-edged sword. You are already accused of being westernised, of being pet poodles of the West, all these attempts to undermine your right to speak in a public space on Islam. In fact, two organisations last year wanted to give awards to Sisters-in-Islam for our work on Islam and I had to say no to that because it will not help our cause. But certainly quiet support, we do get funding from Ford Foundation, from private foundations like that. But even the kind of funding that we get from foreign foundations, that is also used against us. But we tell them, you get your funding from Saudi Arabia, from Iran, from other countries, the government gets its funding from foreign countries, why is that not an issue but when we get our funding from overseas it is an issue. If you don't want us to get funding from overseas then you give us the funding, within Malaysia. It is a double-edged sword and we always have to be so careful about welcoming expressions of support and overt support to the work that we do. Especially now with US foreign policy on Iraq, on the Palestinian struggle, it will not help our cause.

Ulil Abshar-Abdalla

This is a problem facing the liberal Muslims in Indonesia. I am always accused of being an ally of American, agent of CIA of America and have an unlimited access to American money. This is an allegation that people repeat against me.

We are living now in an interdependent system. We cannot live separating ourselves from others. This is the fact that we are facing now. This is the idea that I come forward in my column that arise some controversies. The Muslims should define themselves as a member of the international system because what people like Ba'asyir struggled for is how to build a system based on Islam in which Islam is

isolated from all other people in the world — Islam as a category versus non-Islam as a different category as others. This is the danger that we are facing. We should challenge this view. Muslims should look at themselves as a member of the universal family. I think there is no point of adopting such notion as a house of Islam, Darul Islam and Darul Harab, or house of war, house of peace and house of war. This is a classical notion to justify the drawing line between Muslim and non-Muslim. This is the basic ideology used by radical groups to establish a demarcation between Muslim and non-Muslim, therefore justifying the use of violence against non-Muslim. We should challenge this view. The allegation that I am an ally or agent of America is based on the assumption that America is an enemy of Islamic world and Islam is a different category. This allegation is not based on strong foundation.

Question

My question is, what is role of madrasahs or pesantrons in your country in producing the kinds of Muslims who are then susceptible to the blandishments of the people whom you criticise. What kind of Islamic education is being imparted at that level, at a very young level to children in your country?

Ulil Abshar-Abdalla

The issue of madrasahs is becoming the centre of attention after September 11. Tom Friedman had written a lot of columns focussing on the problems of madrasahs in Muslim world because madrasahs breed radicalism, fundamentalist understanding of Islam. Madrasah has different colours and different faces in different countries. I mentioned before that the breeding ground for radicalism and fundamentalism in Indonesia is secular universities.

I am a product of the madrasahs. I spent almost twenty years studying Islamic sciences in madrasah and then continuing my study in the wahabi university. I am a product of the wahabi system but I rebelled against it. Madrasah is different in Indonesia. Of course there is a spectrum of madrasah in Indonesia, there is a traditional madrasah, there is a modern madrasah. Mostly madrasah in Indonesia is more or less modern madrasah in the sense that it combines between the Islamic subject and the modern subject. Almost all madrasahs in Indonesia adopt a mixed

system, a religious system and secular system. It teaches modern Sciences side by side with Islamic Sciences. I think madrasah is not, in my understanding, the breeding ground for the radicalism. There is certain pesantrons like Ngruki, established by Ba'asyir and Abdullah Sungkar in 1970s. This pesantran is very typical, it is quite different from the mainstream pesantran in the country. I could say that there is only three or four pesantrons with a similar type of Ngruki pesantran in Java, one in Solo established by Ba'asyir, another one is in Lamugan in East Java. The other one is in Bangil and Garot in West Java. Only four pesantrons which adopt a very strict and conservative understanding of Islam. The majority of madrasah and pesantran in Indonesia is of different type. I am not apologetic in this point, I just tell you the different types of madrasah and the majority mainstream madrasah is modern madrasah.

Zainah Anwar

The issue in Malaysia is not about militant Islam because there is no way militant Islam and the use of violence in Malaysia could ever be tolerated or could ever gain public support. If you look at the kind of terrorists who have been arrested under the ISA, most of them are not products of madrasahs, they are products of the secular education system. The challenge is really the conservative ideology that is being taught. It is not just in the madrasahs, in the privately-owned madrasahs run by ulamahs, the Islamic schools run by the government and the teaching of Islam in the secular school system which really churns out very conservative minds when it comes to Islam, and very compartmentalised minds as well. They can study in the US and get degrees and actually believe in human rights, and many of them in the *reformasi* movement talked about human right and justice and democracy and yet when it comes to Islam, all these principles stopped at the door of Islam. Suddenly when it comes to Islam there is no human rights, there is no democracy, there is no freedom of expression, freedom of religion. And yet they called themselves human rights defenders. It is the way Islam has been taught in Malaysia, very conservative Islam, that makes these people unable to apply that if you believe in these principles of human rights, it has to apply with the religion as well. The ability of the mind to open

up to that is just not there. It is the way Islam is taught throughout the whole education system and not the madrasahs.

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