

Info Paper: New Policy ‘Rahmatan lil Alamin’ Prime Minister’s Department

Background

Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department announced that the concept of “Rahmatan lil’alamin” (mercy to all creations) will become part of the country’s new policy in the government’s bid to create the new image of Malaysia. The proposal is also based on the concepts of Maqasid Shariah and the Malaysian Model.¹ As of 26 April 2019, the proposal has yet to be brought to the Cabinet. He has however been discussing with several ministries on the matter.

What is ‘Rahmatan lil’alamin’?

This concept refers to mercy to all and comes from the Surah al-Anbiya verse 107 in the Quran that says “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.” From what Dr Mujahid has been championing, his perspective is that in Islamic teaching it is wrong to oppress others such as non-Muslims, LGBT and so on. This concept is not commonly quoted by Islamic scholars from outside Malaysia and Indonesia, however mercy is widely discussed in a myriad of contexts.

Dr Mujahid started championing this concept after becoming part of government however only in speeches and not as an announcement of policy that happened recently. It is likely that this response is due pressure from all sides of supporters which include the liberal / LGBT and conservative Muslim community

What is Maqasid Syariah?

The Maqasid Syariah started from former PM Najib Razak’s time in 2015 and a Syariah Index was implemented to measure how much government policies were following the Maqasid principles; protection of the religion, protection of life, protection of the mind, protection of the race and protection of property. In 2017 it was simply announced that the index fared better at 76.06% compared with 75.42% two years ago when it first started,

¹ <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2019/04/26/rahmatan-lil-alamin-to-be-new-malaysias-policy-says-mujahid/>

however the PMO was very vague as to how these were measured. In 2018 there were no more announcements.

It is also unclear on whether the PH government has decided to follow the exact model or make adjustments. There is no available info on what is “The Malaysian Model”.

On another note, Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said Malaysia would also promote the idea of Syariah Maqasid and “Muslim democrats” as new “Islamic products”, as well as existing products such as the Islamic financial system and Islamic banking system, and that Malaysia will also highlight the ‘Malay World’ and its positive values that can be shared, such as love for peace and living together in harmony², which has a similar concept to Rahmatan lil’alamin. On 22 April 2019, Wisma Putra announced it promote Malay culture as example of multiculturalism³.

Political Implications

Since holding office, Dr Mujahid has had some backlash from both liberal and conservative sides which has made it seem as though he’s constantly making contradicting statements (stands) especially on the LGBT issue;

17 July 2018

Dr Mujahid was quoted saying the LGBT and transgender communities have rights as Malaysians and should not be discriminated⁴

8 Aug 2018

Portraits of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists were removed from the George Town Festival on the orders of Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa.⁵ He said the portraits of activists Nisha Ayub and Pang Khee Teik were removed as they were promoting LGBT activities, which were not in line with the Pakatan Harapan government's policies.

² <https://www.thesundaily.my/local/polishing-malaysia-s-image-solving-disputes-among-ph-s-foreign-relations-achievements-IX819758>

³ <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/04/22/wisma-putra-to-promote-malay-culture-as-example-of-multiculturalism-says-sa/1745826>

⁴ <http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/golongan-lgbt-tidak-harus-didiskriminasi-di-tempat-kerja-mujahid-180690>

⁵ <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/08/08/mujahid-portraits-of-lgbt-activists-removed-from-george-town-festival-on-my-orders/#eHkCGmfCr1LiC6u0.99>

11 Aug 2018

Dr Mujahid clarified that his recent meeting with transgender advocate Nisha Ayub does not signify his endorsement for the LGBT community. The meeting with transgender advocate Nisha Ayub did not touch on equal rights of same-sex marriages but on the discrimination faced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. However Dr Mujahid stressed that there was a need to eradicate the hate and discrimination culture face by the community in the work place and also in public areas. "We cannot practice favouritism policies when carrying out preaching works, where Islam too did not encourage its believers to hurt other people. Their rights as Malaysians cannot be denied," he said.⁶

13 Aug 2018

Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa clarified that he has not given any instruction to transgender people to access female public toilet.

10 March 2019

Dr Mujahid reaffirms stand against gay lifestyle, saying the government remains strongly against the LGBT lifestyle, which will never be allowed in the country.⁷

Conclusion

By championing for a 'mercy for all' concept, it is likely that Dr Mujahid is trying to balance out the liberal and conservative sides on the issue without further courting criticism from the public and the opposition. This is a difficult task as voters in GE14, on one hand believed that; LGBT rights would be acknowledged and yet on the other hand; a more conservative form of Islam would prevail. The question is now how does Dr Mujahid plan to implement this and avoid any controversy from the two jarring sides.

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⁶ <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/08/11/mujahid-meeting-was-over-lgbt-discrimination/#o07GD2bo8MQMxUdb.99>

⁷ <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/03/467699/mujahid-shocked-kl-lgbt-rally-reaffirms-stand-against-gay-lifestyle>