

RESOLVING RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN MALAYSIA UNDER PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMAD (1981 – 2003)

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Abstract: Associated with the development of Malaysia for 22 years (1981-2003), Mahathir Mohamad, who assumed the Prime Minister position, led Malaysia during important years to become a prosperous country. Even the most fastidious experts must admit that Mahathir has successfully implemented strict control of the country's economy and is the first to bring about political stability and resolve ethnic conflicts in Malaysia. Mahathir devoted most of his youth to political career, building a peaceful, stable and developed Malaysia nowadays. The following article focuses on analyzing the following issues: 1) Ethnic and religious ideological context in Malaysia; 2) Resolving ethnic and religious conflicts in Malaysia under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad

Keywords: Mahathir Mohamad; prime minister of Malaysia, islam, ethnicity, religion.

РАЗРЕШЕНИЕ РАСОВЫХ И РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ КОНФЛИКТОВ В МАЛАЙЗИИ ПРИ ПРЕМЬЕР-МИНИСТРЕ МАХАТИРЕ МОХАМАДЕ (1981 – 2003 гг.)

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Аннотация: Махатхир Мохамад, занявший пост премьер-министра, в течение 22 лет (1981-2003) занимался развитием Малайзии и в важные годы руководил Малайзией, чтобы она стала процветающей страной. Даже самые привередливые эксперты должны признать, что Махатхир успешно осуществил строгий контроль над экономикой страны и первым обеспечил политическую стабильность и разрешил этнические конфликты в Малайзии. Большую часть своей юности Махатхир посвятил политической карьере, строя сегодня мирную, стабильную и развитую Малайзию. Следующая статья посвящена анализу следующих вопросов: 1) Этнический и религиозный идеологический контекст в Малайзии; 2) Разрешение этнических и религиозных конфликтов в Малайзии под руководством премьер-министра Махатхира Мохамата.

Ключевые слова: Махатхир Мохамад; премьер-министр малайзии, ислам, этническая принадлежность, религия.

Introduction

The outstanding feature of the population of Malaysia is its multi-racial cultural component: 55% of the population is Malaysian and some indigenous people (Bumiputras); 34% are Chinese; 9% are Indian; and other components account for 22% [1, p.5]. This greatly hinders the construction of Malaysia. The more diverse and different the identity of each ethnic group is, the more challenging ethnic unity is. Very early on, Mahathir Mohamad - Prime Minister of Malaysia (1981-2003) realized that in order to fight for the progress and future of the Malaysian, he needed to know more about them in more detail. During his research and study process, Mahathir realized that ethnic equality and construction... of religion are the prerequisites for national harmony and unity.

1. Ethnic and religious ideological context in Malaysia

1.1. The crisis of ethnic ideology

Looking back through history since the 15th century, due to colonial expansion and exploitation and the limitations of the Malaysian labor market, the West had actively created large migrations from China and India through labor recruitment periods. In the newly developed areas of Malaysia, Malaysians became the minority. Their country was dominated by capitalist enterprises and Chinese merchants. The workforce was mainly Chinese and Indians, who controlled the economic activity while Malaysians continued to be rice farmers, possessing small and scattered amounts of rubber and coconuts. The peninsula's racial characteristics had changed within one generation. Malaysians could not adapt to the change and noticed that they were being "kicked out of their homes and standing at their doorstep" both politically and economically.

The presence of the Chinese made Malaysians feel like they were in a weaker position. The Chinese did whatever they could do but better and at a cheaper price. That was the reason why they found themselves losing competitiveness against the Chinese. Therefore, Malaysians are always aware that they must maintain the political status in Malaysia otherwise their position and rights will not be guaranteed.

For a long time, the British considered ethnic diversity in Malaysia an important factor, ensuring safety and security in a way that benefits them. This nature of a multi-ethnic nation without a dominant subject is also the cause of later profound conflicts in Malaysian society.

It is clear that ethnic diversity has been the essence of Malaysia since its founding. Ethnic integration here took place a long time ago in history when small states living side by side, thanks to economic strength gradually conquered other small states. Although being part of the Bumiputra indigenous people, the Kadazan people are completely different from the Iban and even more from the Malay people on the West Coast. However, the most crucial difference in the Malaysian ethnic overview was brought about by the history of migration. The presence of the Chinese and Indians was a major turning point that transformed Malaysian society from a subject society (Malaysians are the majority) to a non-subject society (no ethnic group is the majority or holds outstanding power both economically and politically). The Malaysians, even with great political support, are not strong enough to be the soul and backbone to lead the entire community of other ethnic groups. The Chinese, with their powerful economy, are also not enough to make decisions to modify the relationship between ethnic communities here.

1.2. Religious overview in Malaysia

The major changes in the world situation in recent years have been more or less related to Islam, not only in the Middle East region, nor simply were economic - political - social conflicts, but also reflects cultural and ideological conflicts. That context affects economic - political - social life around the world, including Southeast Asia.

Malaysia in that context is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country in which Malaysians gain political and cultural superiority but not economic advantage. In modern Malaysian society, they have full political power and are guaranteed many other privileges by the constitution. The Malaysian community is also the largest Muslim community in Malaysia, Malaysian identity and Islamic identity are tightly intertwined, affecting every means of social life.

However, in Malaysia there is not only the Malay Muslim community but also the others, including Chinese and Indians who have great economic advantages. Malaysians, the true owners of the country and the key power holders, mainly live in rural and underdeveloped areas, while the Chinese, accounting for 30% of the population, are concentrated in the most developed areas. This is an extremely sensitive and complicated relationship between ethnicity and religion that the Malaysian government, especially under Mahathir Mahamad, is particularly concerned about.

The imprint of Islam in society, politics, and culture of Malaysia is exceedingly deep. Muslims live based on the laws prescribed by the Qur'an. Islam followers have established a separate economy with full economic institutions such as Banks, Islamic Business Associations, had a unique education system such as International Islamic Universities, and had their own voice in the state management agency. They comply with religious restrictions and are also judged according to the religion's own regulations. That does not mean that they are completely strangers to other non-Islamic communities in Malaysia, but the truth is that Muslims in Malaysia - the majority group - have imprinted a deep mark of Islam for themselves into all areas of life here.

The Federal Constitution of Malaysia stipulates that Islam is the religion of the Federation, ensuring an important position in economic, political, cultural and social life in Malaysia for Islam and Malay Muslims. However, the Federal Constitution also stipulates that Islam is a state issue, so legislative and executive powers on issues related to Islam belong to the responsibility of state governments. Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy in which the Constitution has supreme power, therefore, Islamic law in Malaysia is only valid for Muslims and only applied in some areas of marriage and family, inheritance rights as well as other purely religion-related matters. That ensures democracy, equality and religious freedom for all communities living together in Malaysia. However, as a national religion, Islam enjoys numerous privileges that other religions do not, such as the right to enforce Islamic law and establish a Syariah court system to adjudicate cases related to Islam...., despite being only limited to the Muslim community.

All rules of personal behavior, from family, neighbor, community, relationships to economic and political life, from marriage to charity to relationships with non-Islamic people have a standard for Muslims to follow. Their lives from the moment of their birth are filled with prayers, until they are ready to return to God, they still try their best to recite prayers to prove their belief in the Supreme Being of Allah. Besides performing their civic duties, above all, they also have noble religious obligations that will be performed throughout their entire lives. That is their obligation before their religion and Allah in their faith.

Thus, in reality, Islam has a great influence on all aspects of people's lives and religious control in Malaysia is only a measure applied by the state to direct the development of religion towards the goal of sustainability of the country.

The connection between religion and politics of Islam is also strengthened by the fact that Islam is not only manifested in the field of religious worship and political institutions but also undertakes the social functions of the community. Like other major religions in the world, Islam also encourages charity in its followers. However, no other religion but Islam makes that a mandatory duty. Not only does it limit in calling for and stipulating systems of practicing charity, Islam also confirms the obligations of believers in relationships with family, clan, friends and acquaintances, and the Islamic community, and non-Islamic people. The Qur'an also defines the duties and rights of followers not only as believers but also as "*citizens*", such as regulations on freedom of speech, freedom of body, security of life and property, the right to live, freedom of belief and association... The above political characteristics of Islam can be clearly seen through some laws drawn from the Qur'an and Hadith. The domestic and foreign policies of the Malaysian government increasingly enhanced the role and status of Islam in all areas of Malaysian social life in the late 1980s.

2. Resolving ethnic and religious conflicts in Malaysia under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad

While politics, Islam and ethnicity in Malaysia develop in a completely different context, the Malaysian government under Mahathir Mohamad is well aware of the significance of the equitable implementation issue and has

made efforts to overcome the country's remaining problems with the motto "*Economic development with the process of ethnic and national unification*". In addition, the formation and power strengthening of a ruling coalition is extremely necessary to synthesize national strength as well as coordinate the needs of each different ethnic group within a social structure of national harmony. This was concretized by Mahathir in resolving ethnic conflicts in Sabah and religious issues in Kelantan.

2.1. Ethnic issues in Sabah and maintaining the Malaysian federation

- Geographic differences

Malaysia is a country where $\frac{3}{4}$ of the area is mountainous. Land is mainly differentiated according to terrain. In highlands, the majority of soil is podzol which are extremely chemically poor and often have a clay layer underneath, making it difficult for roots to penetrate through and water stagnates, while soils under forests can be rich in organic compounds and are able to maintain fertility. The well-known rubber belt on the western coast of the peninsula is mainly grown on this type of soil. Inland, there are many suitable lands for cultivation with an area of about 400,000 hectares.

In the 1960s, there were large migrations, mainly to plant oil palm trees, mostly in the Jengka triangle. On the West Coast, alluvial soil from the sea is very suitable for rice cultivation, numerous plantations have been built such as coconut, rubber, oil palm, cocoa plantations,... In the low plains of the Eastern seaboard of Sabah and Sarawak, due to sedimentation lagoons, the soil is often contaminated by acidic sulfates, making it impossible to grow crops without special amendments. In Sarawak alone, this type of soil occupies more than 100,000 hectares. Most of Sabah's area is mountainous while rivers and coastlines here form the main roads, road traffic in Sabah is still very limited because of its extremely complex terrain.

Thus, it can be seen that despite being in the same country, the natural conditions of Sabah are completely different. The distance across the East Sea as well as the lack of sharing the same natural environment are the premise for the differences that lead to the separation between Sabah and Kuala Lumpur. Traveling between the West Coast and the East Coast of Malaysia for a long time is also very difficult, making the already long distances even longer.

- Ethnic complexity

Beside that, in terms of ethnicity, Sabah and Sarawak are more diverse than peninsular Malaysia where there are only three main groups of people are the Malay (61%), the Chinese (28%) and the Indians (8 %). For example, there are 27 minority groups in Sarawak and 35 in Sabah. This ethnic complexity has made the political delineation here not as simple as in peninsular Malaysia.

Therefore, ethnic relations in Sabah exist in parallel of two complexities: First is that the residential community in Sabah itself is an inconsistent entity, including many ethnic groups with many linguistic and cultural characteristics differences. Second, the people of Sabah themselves feel that they are not similar to the Malays on the West Coast and they perceive themselves as a different population that does not share any similar natural conditions or economic potential.

- The oblivion of Sabah in Malaysian history

The gap between Kuala Lumpur and Sabah is not only the differences in geography, soil across the East Sea or ethnic complexity, but also a gap in history due to the lack of participation of the Sabahans in the Malaysian history events and they almost separated themselves from that history, considering themselves as an independent community of residents with other concerns of rights. The concern that any citizens in the states of Sarawak and Sabah always feel is that they will become a so-called "Colony" of peninsular Malaysia, which is the fear of the non-Malay and non-Islamic community about political dependence on peninsular Malaysia if they do not pay due attention to the relationship with Kuala Lumpur.

The peninsula's political-religious model does not seem to attract them because here, multi-national parties are an essential principle and religious tolerance is also higher while in the peninsula the competition between parties is also the competition between ethnicities, while Islam is highly politicized.

Additionally, of all the states that make up the Malaysian federation, Sabah is certainly the state with the most differences. Located on the island of Borneo, far from peninsular Malaysia, Sabah along with the state of Sarawak forms East Malaysia. The state's ethnic and religious composition is also different from other states of the federation: the Kadazans that are Christians make up the majority of the population and Joseph Pairin Kitingan, a Christian lawyer, served as governor of the state since 1985. Meanwhile, most of the governors of the remaining states of Malaysia, as well as the federal government of Kuala Lumpur, are Muslims.

- Ethnic groups in Sabah and the persistent conquest of the Mahathir government

The more differences there are, the more difficult the Mahathir government's conquest of Sabah will be. In Sabah, Mahathir had to face the problem of Kadazandusun nationalism right from the moment he assumed the position of Prime Minister in 1981, especially after rumors about the collusion between the federal government and Muslims in Sabah to make Islam become a powerful political force that is in favor of the peninsula and politically marginalized the Kadazandusun people who did not follow Islam.

First, in 1986, Mahathir tried to adapt to political realities in Sabah by pressuring PBS to establish a government coalition composed mainly of Islamists. When PBS refused and won a snap election with the majority of voters supporting it, Mahathir gave in and agreed to accept BPS into BN. But the relationship between BN and PBS is still very cold due to personal conflicts between Mahathir and Pairin.

His political action solves two problems. It was the first step for UMNO to get into Sabah, confirming their long-held intention of becoming a federal-wide political organization, representing the interests of the Malays and the

Muslims. Secondly, UMNO's presence in Sabah increased political strength to Muslims in Sabah. UMNO did not succeed in Sabah from the beginning, but its presence here allowed Mahathir's power to be exercised over the so-called territorial integrity.

The relationship between Sarawak and Mahathir was more pleasant since Sarawak's largest indigenous group, the Dayak, did not have a large community cohesion like the Kadazandusun, so it did not become a counterbalancing force affecting the ambition to conquer the East Coast of UMNO. Furthermore, the leader of Sarawak, who held this role at the same time as Mahathir, acting Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1981, was also a person who had served for many years under the federal government, so it was easier to reach an agreement with the federal government compared to Pairin, who has never had any connection to that government.

Immigration is a wise measure to regulate population structure that the Mahathir government has implemented. Through Sabah's open immigration policy, Mahathir has eased the ethnic relations that overlap tensions here. Facilitating immigration for Indonesians and Muslim Filipinos is intended to create an adequate counterweight to the native Christians here. The Mahathir administration has increased the extension of Sabah citizenship to some Filipino Muslims, creating a number of voters who support Islamist policies in Sabah. Mahathir, with his diligent efforts, had adjusted the ethnic structure as well as the religious composition of Sabah in a direction favorable to UMNO, because certainly in a state where indigenous Christians are the majority, there are not many opportunities for UMNO to penetrate deeply into Sabah's internal affairs.

In 1994, UMNO succeeded in Sabah in the federal election. Victory in Sabah means victory throughout the entire territory and this proves that UMNO is highly trustworthy to the Malaysian ethnic groups. With such positive developments, Mahathir seems to have taken a big step in his political career.

Sabah is not only separated from the rest of Malaysia by a vast coastline but also by its absence from Malaysian history. The people of Sabah do not believe that they share with the peninsular Malaysians a common destiny, interests, and attachment to citizenship in one country. Therefore, it can be said that this conquest was a great success in Mahathir's political career and in the process of maintaining the federation of Malaysia.

Ethnic integration is a prominent feature of Malaysia. With time and the efforts of the government, especially under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysians have accepted their differences with the customs of cultures outside their own but are now living together, sharing the same mission as Malaysian citizens. More than anyone, Mahathir is aware of the power of national unity as a prerequisite for Malaysia's development: "*There will not be a developed Malaysia until we overcome the nine problems that have challenged us since the birth of an independent nation. The first of these must be to establish a Malaysian nation with a sense of commonality, sharing a common destiny among all ethnic groups.*" [2, p. 79].

The United Malays National Organisation UMNO under Mahathir actively fought for the career of building Malaysia into a multi-religious nation. By promoting national spirit, UMNO has gained the support of all ethnic groups in Malaysia to take leadership of the country. UMNO under Mahathir also eliminated Sabah's potential separatist risks by creating a pro-UMNO population under the open immigration policy of the late 1980s. Critic Nathan wrote that "*The national position that Malaysia has acquired over the past decades is the result of a wise plan come up by a person who fervently believed in his dreams and knew how to make them come true.*" [3, p. 80].

2.2. Mahathir's correct policy on religious issues in Kelantan

Religion is the factor that makes a profound difference between a Malaysian and other non-Malaysians even though they live in the same place of residence, use the same language and also participate in the same cultural environment. Marriage between Malays and Chinese almost never happens because of this decisive obstacle.

Through its formation and development throughout history, like many religious researchers have identified, more than any other major religion in the world, the Muslim community is not just a religious community but also the one with distinct social and political characteristics. This special point has its origin right from the teachings as well as the history of the formation of Islam.

Kelantan is one of 13 states of Malaysia, with an area of 14,922 km² located in the northwest of Peninsular Malaysia, facing the South China Sea. The state capital is Kota Bharu which has a high rate of urban development and is rapidly becoming the center of administrative and commercial activities of the state. Kelantan has about 1.4 million people with the majority being Malaysians, accounting for 94% of the population, Chinese accounts for only 5% and Indians accounts for a modest number of only about 1%.

Kelantan is the Malaysian state with the largest Malay population. This is also the state with the highest Muslim population rate in the federation. Kelantan people always believe that they are not like other indigenous people living in Malaysia, and have a rather hostile and discriminatory attitude toward other communities. Because there are many Muslims, Kelantan is also a stronghold of the PAS party since it received commitment from the party to promote Islam and build an Islamic state. Therefore, for a long time Kelantan was the place where many of the fiercest religious conflicts took place when the state demanded the application of Islamic law here as well as established regulations that are different from the federal ones to serve the religious needs.

The identity of Kelantan residents may be Malaysian or not, but is only available to those who satisfy at least one of the following conditions:

1. People born in Kelantan whose father is Malaysian
2. People born anywhere but whose father is Malaysian and were born in Kelantan
3. People born anywhere but whose parents are both Malaysian and have lived in Kelantan for at least 15 years.

4. *People born in Kelantan whose father is Muslim and mother is Malaysian.*

5. *People born in Kelantan whose father was also born in Kelantan* [1, p. 334].

Thus, only Malaysians satisfy the first three conditions and Muslims satisfy the fourth. Opportunities for people who are neither Malaysians nor Muslims to become Kelantan citizens are very limited. Therefore, Kelantan is increasingly limiting itself to the Islamic atmosphere. Kelantan's strict regulations have prevented non-Muslims from coming here to settle.

Before Mahathir became Prime Minister of Malaysia, from the end of 1977 the rift of relationships between UMNO and Barisan Nasional and between UMNO and PAS reached the point of complete breakdown, when PAS left or was expelled from the National Front. PAS put pressure on the Kelantan government, which at that time was under pro-UMNO Nasir. The federal government has declared Kelantan in a state of emergency and directly led the state. When Mahathir became Prime Minister, Kelantan state joined the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional, referred to as BN. The relationship between Mahathir and Kelantan only really gained attention in 1987 when Tengku Razaleigh, a member of the Kelantan Royal Council, became a challenger for Mahathir's current UMNO presidency. When Razaleigh failed, he left UMNO and founded Semangat 46 (Spirit of 46). The number 46 reminds people of the original spirit of UMNO right from the first days of its founding in 1946. Kelantan became the headquarters of S46 and many UMNO members in this state also switched to follow S46.

Three years after the 1990 general election, many Kelantan electors rallied behind Razaleigh and the PAS party. Electors in Kelantan are typically divided into three fairly equal factions: pro-UMNO, PAS and royalty. Mahathir realized that only by overcoming political obstacles could he pave the way for cultural and religious development, and only then could issues related to Islam in Kelantan easily achieve consensus.

The federal government wanted to create a parallel government in Kelantan to establish a necessary and strong enough influence on the state. The federal government also does not want Kelantan to receive external support because of the concern that the opposition will rely on it to develop into a separatist movement, causing events that can be called political instability in the country. However, despite sanctions such as cutting aid to Kelantan, the PAS party continued to be trusted to vote by the people here in the 1995 and 1999 elections. Faced with such a situation, S46 has secretly negotiated with UMNO and accepted certain compromise conditions for UMNO to regain members from this party. In October 1996, S46 announced its dissolution and Razaleigh returned to support the UMNO party, leaving PAS alone to continue fighting on the Malaysian front.

In general, it can be said that Mahathir in most cases does not interfere deeply in the internal affairs of each state. In the peninsula, Mahathir and UMNO expected the states to resolve their problems peacefully and with little fuss. That is because they realize the fact that the same problem will be solved more smoothly at the state government level than by bringing it to the federal government. Similarly with the case of Kelantan, Mahathir is aware that this state has different conditions in terms of customs and lifestyle. Kelantan is a closed society where local traditions and Islam play an important role that influences state politics. Kelantan severely suffered under the powerful Siamese empire. The population here is mostly Malaysian and the political landscape is the competition between neutral and secular Muslims represented by UMNO and radical Muslims represented by PAS. Kelantan people consider themselves different from other peninsular people. They speak a dialect distinct from the general Malaysian language and their adherence to Islam is also more strict than in the rest of the peninsula's west coast. The Kelantan people have a unique Malaysian culture and over time have become more and more distinct from the Malaysian community in Malaysia as a whole.

If there is a problem happening in Kelantan, UMNO's leaders always ask UMNO facilities here to solve it beforehand and then consider the possibility of entrusting the federation to handle the issue. Mahathir's intervention was only at the final stage when it was absolutely necessary to be present. For example, when Kelantan fell into the hands of PAS, Mahathir had to appoint himself as UMNO Liaison Commissioner in Kelantan and when Tengku Razaleigh returned to UMNO, he immediately appointed Razaleigh to this position to pass the Kelantan problem back for the Kelantan people to deal with.

According to Mahathir, only the territorial integrity of the Malaysian federation is considered the top priority while all differences between states are only secondary issues that do not deserve too much attention. The separate identity of each state is also considered and decided in relation to the whole that is federation.

Considered as neutral, Mahathir and UMNO have chosen a pragmatic and progressive stance on the issue of Islam in Kelantan. Mahathir believes that Muslims must develop economically, promote science and technology as well as increase the rate of intellectual labor for their religion to be admired and respected as they desire. It was he who came up with many plans to exchange young intellectual forces between Kelantan and other states to create harmony among the new generation of Kelantan to dilute the extremist pro-PAS religious atmosphere here.

Many people have argued that UMNO under Mahathir was too gentle on Kelantan and lost the state to the PAS party, but it seems that in the context of Malaysia, the loss of UMNO's federal veto power is unavoidable and although Kelantan is under PAS control, it is only nominal. UMNO still has the necessary powers and intervention in Kelantan affairs, enough to ensure the effective management of the Mahathir government.

Conclusion

Entering the 80s of the twentieth century under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir Mahamad, Malaysia, thanks to the right measures in resolving the relationship between ethnic and religious issues, continued to accomplish great achievements in its developing process. None believes that in just a few decades, Malaysia has become the most developed among the developing countries in Southeast Asia, a stronghold of Islam in the world, and a symbol of national cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

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