

## **The Malay Muslim Dilemma in Malaysia after the 12th General Election**

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### **Abstract**

The results of the 12th Malaysian General Election, held in March 2008, revealed unexpected surprises. The aim of this article is to examine the concerns and dilemma of Malay Muslim after that political tsunami. For the first time since its reign which started in 1951, the ruling party, Barisan Nasional (BN), lost the 2/3 majority in parliament. The defeat of many BN candidates has opened the eyes of many people that anything can happen in the elections. The ruling party realised that if the people's declining support towards them is not carefully handled, it will result in worse results during the next general election. On the other hand, some parties feel that the victory of many candidates that unite under the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) does not leave a good impression on the future of Malay Muslims. However, efforts have been made in order to convince the people that the progress and development of the country will continue. This article shows that there are still many who doubt PR's ability to fight for the nation especially the issues related to Islam. Its leaders, however, plead for the opportunity to be given to rule in order to implement and achieve what they promise in their party's manifestos.

**Keywords:** 12<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE12), Malaysian politics, future of Malays, Islam, Barisan Nasional (BN), Pakatan Rakyat (PR)

### **Introduction**

Election system within democracy is arguably provides equal right to the people to choose their representatives in the government system. Free election is one of the ways within democracy to choose representatives confidently (Young, 2009). The democracy system practised in many countries is normally similar to the principles of democracy carried out in other countries such as the United Kingdom, Indonesia, the United States of America and others, which involves the voting process and elections. Malaysia is one of those who practice democracy involving elections (Moten, 2011). Elections normally refer to the process of gaining the support and confidence of the people in order to enable a candidate to be chosen as the leader of a particular area or organisation. In fact, it also determines the country's leadership. In other words, democracy allows political rights to each individual involved in the country's administration, especially equality in choosing and being chosen.

In this matter, Islam has outlined several guidelines in the selection of leaders. This is because the leaders are those who will carry out the responsibility as a *khalifa* or caliph in his area. These responsibilities include implementing and enforcing religion as

well as managing, administering and bringing prosperity to the country in accordance with Islam. The same idea applies in the selection of leaders, in that it is an *amanah* or responsibility that must be fulfilled according to *syaria*. This is because if anything goes wrong in the appointment of leaders, it means that we have handed the responsibilities to underserving persons- an act which is clearly against the teachings of Islam (Esposito, 2010). Malaysia has consistently and regularly conducted elections beginning in 1955. This was the pre-independence election which was known as the Federal Legislative Council Election. The first general election after independence was held in 1959, and followed by another in 1964 and 1969 (Dalia, 2008) and so on, with a five-year gap between each general election. However, the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, which was held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008 has created a new political phenomenon for the people of Malaysia. Many post-GE12 issues arose, leading towards tension among the people of multiracial Malaysia.

### **A review of the 12<sup>th</sup> general election results**

Thus the main question arises as to why the ruling party Barisan Nasional (BN) lost the 2/3 majority for control in parliament for the very first time in the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008. Even though BN won 140 out of the 222 Parliament seats offered, it was still a 'bitter pill' for the ruling party to swallow; a 'victory in defeat'. It is possible that the results of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election in 2008 will become the starting point for political change in Malaysia. During this election, the results showed that the *Parti Keadian Rakyat* (PKR) won 31 seats in Parliament, while Democratic Action Party (DAP) and *Parti Islam se-Malaysia* (PAS) won 28 and 23 seats respectively. Thus, the total number of seats won by the opposition, using the platform of *Barisan Alternatif* (BA) which is now popularly known as *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR), stood at 82 which is equal to 51.3% of the total number. Meanwhile, BN's votes dropped to 48.7% as compared to the 64% in 2004 (Mior, 2008: 18). This showed in terms of the vote count, BN suffered defeat. Opposition party has been gaining more support in Johor, the state that is a stronghold of the ruling party of United Malay National Organization (UMNO). However, UMNO lost in Selangor, the heart of Malaysia's states which is highly industrialized and developed state in Malaysia. BN has also lost in Perak which has lots of natural resources such as timbers and agriculture land. The loss in Perak was only a temporary where BN has regained control after the state's three representatives under PKR and DAP left their respective parties and have become independent representatives, and supporting BN and UMNO. This happened 9 months after Perak was governed by opposition, led by PAS state representative, Muhammad Nizar Jamaluddin. So, BN has regained enough support of state's representatives to form a state government in Perak without going for general election. A new state government of Perak is led by Zamri Abdul Kadir, an UMNO member.

Other states which have gone to oppositions are Penang and Kedah. Penang was ruled by *Gerakan*, a coalition member of BN. *Gerakan* suffered a great loss during the general election of 2008, leaving them with no seats in Penang. DAP who got a majority control, formed the state government led by Lim Guan Eng under the opposition coalition of *Barisan Alternatif*. Kedah also fell onto *Barisan Alternatif* and the state government is led by Azizan Abdul Razak of PAS. Another surprise was the fall of Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory to opposition. Federal Territory has no state seats; it

has only parliament seats. Majority of parliament seats in Federal Territory won by opposition coalition parties (Singh, 2009; Fee & Appudurai, 2008). However, BN still dominated Parliament of Malaysia. Sabah and Sarawak contributed greatly towards BN's control over Parliament. In addition, according to the voting results most of the Malay, Chinese and Indian voters have changed direction and voted for the opposition.

During the General Elections, racial composition is not relevant. This is because the people only need to make a choice between voting for BN through UMNO, MCA, MIC or Gerakan, or to choose one of the parties under BA which are PKR, PAS and DAP, whose candidates contest without regard for skin colour. This has been proven on the results for various areas. For example, if a particular area is made up of a majority of Indians and Chinese, while the candidate chosen is a Malay, they would still vote for this candidate as long as he is under their preferred party (Berger, 2010). The drastic change that took place needs to be studied in detail, and not merely based on assumptions. There must be certain reasons and rational grounds. The reality is that many issues have been triggered off by this election. Therefore, in order to move forward BN must be bold in examining and analysing the mistakes or blunders that have been overlooked. They must prepare to look and listen to the complaints and opinions of the people for the sake of national peace and political balance.

### **Special privileges of the Malays, Islam and 'social contract'**

The special rights or privileges of the Malays are not an issue for debate as it has been clearly discussed in the Malaysian Federal Constitution, Article 153. The Malay Civilisation is the basis for the formation of the Malaysian civilisation. Part of the system and values which existed during the golden age of the Malay civilisation has been adopted and modified to suit the formation of Malaysia. For example, the systems used in Malaysia today such as the government and legal systems are influenced by the Malay civilisation. In fact, the position of Islam as the state religion, the preservation of the Malay customs through the institution of the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* and the Conference of Rulers, the use of the Malay language as the official language, and the special position of Malays and *bumiputra* are all evidence of the importance of the Malay civilisation in the Malaysian daily life. The Malay language was the lingua franca among the traders who came to do business in this area, in addition to being the language of unity in the Malay world (Zainal Abidin, 2006: 333-336).

The term 'social contract' actually does exist in the history of this country and it is the consensus that has been achieved which defines our country and so determines its nature (Ahmad Ali *et. al.*, 2011). Something that must be understood on the issue of 'social contract' is that Malaysia's independence was achieved through the agreement and understanding between the Malaysian people who are made up of various races and ethnic groups. There is no meaning for a developed and advanced country if the people live in a state of chaos and disunity. It must be understood that the understanding between the ethnics has been achieved since before independence. It has become the best formula for creating social balance in this country of diverse races, religions and cultures. The peace that its people have achieved to this day has become a form of guarantee for the country to keep moving forward (Muda, 2008). The signing of the Federal Constitution was also attended and agreed upon by the parties which represented the people - UMNO, MCA and MIC.

The existence of the understanding between the ethnics has resulted in a number of positive impacts on Malaysia and its people. One of the impacts is the existence of the Constitution, and the achievement of independence. It is also the key link between the multiple races in Malaysia. Apart from that, it is also the fundamental basis for the ruling system which has made our country into a parliamentary democracy and the constitutional monarchy with the concept of states and federal territories. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are four important elements that exist in the understanding between ethnics which are constitution, independence, ethnic relation and ruling system (Muda, 2008).

### **The Malay supremacy, Islam and the term ‘Malay’**

Measured from a historical and geographical perspective, we would see that every nation and race had its own geographic boundaries. The Malay language and the indigenous people were the original inhabitants of Tanah Melayu. The British colonisation has brought a new era to the formation of Malaysia, a country which later became brighter and livelier as well as welcoming other races such as the Chinese who came from China and the Indians from India. The presence of immigrants from India and China were to fulfil the working sector which lacked of workers. The Indians were placed in estates and most of them worked as rubber tappers. Meanwhile, the Chinese were placed in mines to work as tin miners. On the other hand, the Malays lived in the villages and worked as farmers. However, the presence of people from other countries did not interfere with the political rights and the supremacy of the Malays, as well as the power of the royalty.

Islam and the Malays seem inseparable. Malaysia constitution, article 160, defines Malay as Muslim, speak Malay and adhere to Malay custom. Hence, Malays are those who can speak Malay language, practice Islam and the Malay way of life (Wan, 2002: 1). Apart from that, there are two other opinions on establishing the definition of the term ‘Malay’. The first is based on the branch or group to which the Malay race and language belongs, which is the Malay-Indonesian or Archipelago branch, which groups together the Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Acehnese, Batak, Minangkabau, Sasak, Melanau, Iban, and the Bugis. The second opinion is based on territory which is the South-East Asian region which covers Southern Siam, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Sunda, Borneo, Sulawesi, the Philippines, the islands of eastern Indonesia, and also small parts of Cambodia to Vietnam (Windstedt, 1953: 5-12). However, what really made this territory part of the Malay Islands or the Malay World is the use of the Malay language itself (Mohd Koharudin, 2005: 5).

In terms of the supremacy of the Malays in the blessed land of Malaysia and also the Malay Rulers, it is clear that the issue need not be debated by any party as it has been enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution and was agreed upon by various parties since long. According to Section 2 of the Constitution, there are several issues regarding the Malays and the Malay Rulers. Article 152 is related to the national language while Article 153 is concerned with the special position of the Malays and *bumiputra* as well as the legitimate interests of other communities. Meanwhile, Article 181 is related to the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers in which the explanations include the implementation of the provisions as specified in the law (Ahmad, 1999: 31-43). Article 152 (1) of the Federal Constitution states the Malay language as the national language but does not

prohibit the use of other languages for other than official purposes. This means that the establishment of the Malay language as the national language does not by any means interfere the position of the respective mother tongues of the various races in Malaysia. Each country has one primary language that acts as the medium for communication for all levels of society that can be understood by all races. Therefore, the authority of the Malay language which has long been established in Tanah Melayu is reason enough to select it as the national language.

In any country, constitutions are born as a result of historical development and not by legal experts. A constitution also extends the original characteristics of a country comprising of the traditional, political and cultural values. It is this theme that underlies certain issues in the Malaysian Constitution, especially regarding the monarchy system, the special rights of the Malays, the Malay language and the position of Islam. Even though Islam is the primary element in the Malay Sultanate, the detailed roles of the Sultans are influenced by current factors and needs. For example, during the British colonial era, the roles or actions of the rulers were based upon the advice or interference from the British (Ahmad, 1999). The effect from ancient history that exists to this day is the Ruler Constitution System which has become the legal system in Malaysia. If this issue is examined with more detail, it will take us to the history of Malaysia when it was known as Tanah Melayu, during which the people greatly honour the kings and were of the opinion that their rulers have sovereignty and should be respected. They believed that the ruler had ultimate authority over the people in his kingdom. However, when the colonialists came and brought with them a new legal system, the British legal system which was applied in the national legislation. Even though British law applied, the Malay Rulers still played certain roles and had certain powers to which they had special privilege and were never excluded by the Constitution. The Malay Sultanate also reflects the original features of Malaysia. It symbolises the continuity of history and has become a part of the country's identity. The existence of the monarchy system also emphasises the Malay features of the country (Harding, 2010).

Ahmad Ibrahim (1999) in his paper entitled 'The Principles of the Islamic Constitution in the Malaysian Institution' suggests that a better way is to look to the Malaysian Constitution positively and to accept and work towards implementing it so as to uphold the principles of an Islamic government. The existence of the constitution was due to the negotiations and compromise between the different races of Malaya. We must respect the agreement that has been reached based on the elements of consideration and friendship between the races. At the same time we should try to think and act positively and use the Constitution so that it upholds the Islamic government principles while at the same time takes into account the interests of all races and ethnic groups in Malaysia (Ahmad, 1999). The Malay civilisation plays an important role in the formation of the Malaysian civilisation. The Malaysian Federal Constitution is an important document which shows the influence and involvement of the Malay civilisation. Today, many governmental institutions demonstrate influence from the Malay civilisation. At the same time, government policies are designed to preserve the values of the Malay civilisation as well as to form a Malaysian nation and civilisation that is united, modern and able to meet internal and external challenges (Zainal Abidin, 2006). Islam cannot be separated from the Malaysian political system, especially before the coming of the British as colonial power to this country. In the Old Malay Laws, the Islamic laws were

used to punish thieves and adulterers in which thieves were punished to the cutting of the hands while adulterers were punished through caning. The Malays have used the Islamic laws which suited the local customs for a long time. Nowadays, after laws reformation in Malaysia, those particular laws have not been practised anymore. Even though Islam is the state religion, the central government has no intention in re-introducing Islamic laws hence the religion is only for ceremonial rites (Abdul Rahman *et. al.*, 2005: 237-238).

### **Problems in racial disunity**

Ever since the results of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008 were announced, many issues and problems have risen to this day. What is most worrying is that some of these issues can lead to division and affect the inter-racial relationships in Malaysia. This matter is of great concern as if we examine the history of the formation of country's constitution, starting from the Malayan Union Constitution in 1946 followed by the Federal Constitution of Tanah Melayu in 1947, we can see that issues on racial interest were the main contributors to the constitution-making process (Marzuki, 2008: 17). The first problem that has been raised recently is the dispute over the matters that have been established in the Federal Constitution. One of the issues that have been the hot topic of debates are relating to Article 153 which is concerned about the special position of the Malays. It has widely discussed especially in daily newspapers such as Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian and others. Here, they have linked PKR and DAP as the most important components in PR with issues of equality which are the main concern of both parties (Anuar, 2008: 6). PR is said to demand to create a country that is egalitarianistic in nature in which all Malaysians can enjoy equal living conditions, equal status and equality in all aspects. This is so that issues on social injustice, discrimination and others can no longer be felt. In fact, it is a manifestation of general human rights in which the bumiputra interests, especially the special position of the Malays which have been stated in the Constitution, are challenged so that the same privileges are given to other races.

However, this issue has been denied by the opposition who claim that the racial political issue which are currently being debated, as substance to mask their efforts in protecting the interests of a handful of politic as elites and cronies of Barisan Nasional (Reports, 2008a). Apart from this, they also assert that they are fighting to uphold the principles that have been established in the Federal Constitution. This includes basic issues such as the position of Islam as the state religion, and the assurance of the freedom to practice other religions, the sovereignty of the Malay language as the national language, the position and sovereignty of the Malay Rulers, the special privileges of the Malays and Bumiputra as well as the rights of all races which are guaranteed by the Constitution. The second problem or issue is related to the New Economic Policy (NEP) which is deemed to be contrary towards the spirit of social contract. This policy is said to give special treatment to the Malays or bumiputra and is a form of discrimination towards other races, making them second class citizens. In reality, the social contract is supposed to create common citizenship which accepts all citizens as equal members. However, how far the issue has been raised is still a question; is it merely an accusation towards another party for the sake of a particular party's interests, or an actual fact that some parties are trying to raise in order to reveal the truth

behind something that has happened? (Mohd Khairi, 2008: 16). It is believed that this issue was triggered since the new government of Penang (which is governed by the opposition party) failed to implement the NEP based on their view that it was never established in the Malaysian Constitution and is not required to be implemented. This matter has caused them to be accused of using the Malays for their own interests.

Therefore, PR holds the view that the UMNO of Pulau Pinang is purposely promoting racial sentiment in order to raise the anger of the Malays living there, in order to show that they still have support after being defeated in the GE12 and failing to maintain their power over the state. PR asserted that in reality, the period for the implementation of the NEP which was introduced in 1971, expired in 1990 and was replaced by the National Development Policy (NDP) from 1991 to 2000 as well as the National Vision Policy (NVP) (2001-2010). Recently the ruling government introduced New Economic Model to as a development policy forward (National Economic Advisory Council, 2010). Going back to the history of the establishment of the NEP which was introduced after the racial riots on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1969, it was said to have been meaningful to the social contract and Article 153. This was because 10 years after the independence date of Tanah Melayu, the Malays or bumiputra were still shrouded in poverty which showed that this matter and the terms of the social contract which surrounded it were meaningless. Therefore, the NEP was introduced in order to help in building the economic abilities of the Malays (Fakhrul Anwar & Wan Norhayate, 2011). However, in addressing this issue, Anwar Ibrahim as the head of PR asserts that the implementation of the NEP which was originally intended to achieve social justice and to promote national unity has been obscured by BN. It has been misused to justify the desires of some UMNO leaders, their families, cronies and friends from among the leaders of MCA and MIC who clinched shares, contracts and privatisation programmes. Unfortunately, Malaysia is also listed among the countries that are growing in human development but with inequality in economic growth. The same applies in terms of the large gap between the city and rural areas which have not been resolved by the alternative measures of the NEP (Nagata, 2010).

Hence, they now insist on carrying out the Malaysian Economic Agenda (MEA) offered by the keADILan party which is said to be more just and equal as well as being able to ensure that nobody is left behind, regardless of race and religion. At the same time, the special rights of the Malays and Islam will remain protected as what has been established in the Federal Constitution. The racial issues in Malaysia were brought further with the arrest of three individuals under the Internal Security Act (ISA) on the offense of raising sensitive issues with regards to inter-racial relations in Malaysia. Those in custody included a DAP parliament member, YB Teresa Kok Su Sim, Raja Petra Kamaruddin and journalist Tan Hoon Cheng on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2008. The background of this problem is rather complicated to be discussed. At one point, there was an incident in which the Penang Hill UMNO Chief Division, during a by-election in 2008, stated that the Chinese in Malaysia are 'immigrants'. This incident was reported by Tan Hoon Cheng, and it was this issue which gave rise to the tension between Gerakan and MCA with UMNO. A lot of speculation was made by various parties whether supporting or disapproving of Tan Hoon Cheng's actions. After that came the issue of the *azan* (call for prayer) and Teresa Kok. She was said to be involved in the efforts of stopping the *azan* at a mosque in Kota Damansara, as well as a petition

to lower the volume of the *azan* at a Masjid in Kinrara. Added to this were her emails in the issue of taking down the *jawi* signboards, which were widely circulated a few days after that (Saravatnamutu, 2009).

The final incident was the issue of Raja Petra Kamaruddin, the webmaster of Malaysia Today. A number of Muslim agencies filed police reports towards his writings in the said website following some articles which included elements of insult (Reports, 2008b) and could raise the anger of Muslims. In fact, after this incident, access to the Malaysia Today domain was blocked, which at the same time betrayed the work guarantee on the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project. It was decided that he would be given a two-year sentence under ISA and sent to the Kamunting Detention Camp, Taiping for allegedly trying to disrupt and threaten the public peace and safety. In accordance with these arrests under ISA, another issue arose debating the opposition towards and the relevance of ISA itself. This was because according to some views, the arrests under ISA were an irrational act and contrary to the principles of justice itself, one of which is the right to be tried before being sentenced to any particular punishment. Meanwhile others agreed with the implementation of the ISA as action taken towards any individuals who try to trigger racial polemic and threatens national security (Liow, 2009). Another problem that arose was about the proposal of the Menteri Besar of Selangor, Khalid Ibrahim who suggested that 10% of the total quota of *Universiti Teknologi MARA* (UiTM) students be opened to non-*bumiputra* and foreign students (Reports, 2008c). This issue received a lot of opposition from many parties including the UiTM students as it conflicted with the university policy, which was built in order to protect the rights of the *bumiputra* in the education field. In fact, the latest issue which involved racial dispute was the Hindu Rights Action Force movement, which was described as racial-based. They were said to have carried out mass riot and discord in order to demand a number of irrational demands towards the rights of Indians including issues concerning poverty, squatting and others. This was followed by opposition towards the action of the Selangor government in demolishing the Sri Maha Kaliamman Temple in Kg. Tasik, Ampang, and their demand for the release of their leaders and friends who were arrested under ISA during an Aidilfitri open house event hosted by the Prime Minister and Muslim cabinet ministers. Their actions were considered as disrespectful towards the celebrations and also challenging the authority of the Prime Minister (Gill & Gopal, 2010).

Therefore, in reference to the problems mentioned, it can be concluded that there are *asabiyyah* or clannish characteristics that is being fought for by the different races in Malaysia, as well as the apparent lack of respect for leaders. The same can be said of Islam as the state religion, the status of which is being threatened as a result of provocation by those who pulled the trigger on racial issues, be it through blogs, articles in newspapers and magazines as well as demands for equal rights in religious practice. For example, the issue of the 'embracing Islam' forum which was planned by the Council of Lawyers sometime ago was deemed as challenging the Muslim institutions in this country who felt that it was impossible to allow 'unqualified' parties to talk and debate on Islamic topics. Therefore, all Islamic bodies and institutions, both governmental and non-governmental (NGOs) stood up to put a top to the forum. However, the Muslim ummah must realise that when issues like this are raised, do they rise to show their opposition for fear that other races or ethnic groups would overtake



them, or they do it for the sincere purpose of protecting the dignity of their religion and ensuring that its enemies do not make fun of it?

Apart from that, people must have a deep and thorough understanding of the social contract and the special privileges of the Malays (which have been established in the Constitution) in order for social peace to be re-attained. In addition, efforts in upholding the dignity and position of Malays should not be seen as *assabiyyah* (clannish). As the indigenous people in this country, they deserve to be given the support to enjoy the privileges from which they were unrightfully denied by the colonists a long time ago. Basically, the term *assabiyah* can be defined as negative racial sentiment (Khairul Azmi & Faizal, 2001: 25). This idea was popular during the *jahiliyyah* period due to the people's deep love for their own race. This occurred without limit to the extent of killing and waging wars for the sake of protecting their own clan or tribe. In this context, we are given guidance in the true meaning of *assabiyyah* based on a *hadith*, in which Rasulullah PBUH stated: "*And they are not from among us, those who promote assabiyyah, those who fight on the platform of assabiyyah, and those who die for the sake of assabiyyah.*" Then the companions *r.a.* asked, "*What is the meaning of assabiyyah, oh Prophet of Allah?*" He replied, "*Helping your brother on the platform of tyranny.*" However, according to Ibn Khaldun, the concept of *assabiyyah* is important as it helps to instil a sense of oneness in order to work for a particular purpose and to avoid from being dominated by another group. At the same time, religion is an important factor as when people unite under the banner of religion, they will be driven towards a more accurate direction (Mohamad Kamil & Mohd Fauzi, 2005: 146). It refers to the tribal or clannish feelings or sentiments which are intended to enable the Muslim leadership to play its role as the vicegerents of Allah, and not to do wrong as forbidden by Rasulullah.

Apart from that, he also spoke of the responsibility of appointing leaders in a particular community and how it is compulsory for the community members to follow in the wake of its leaders once they have been appointed, as is parallel with the teachings of the Quran, as well as giving their strong supports based on their *assabiyah* spirits (Mohamad Kamil & Mohd Fauzi, 2005: 147). Therefore, in the Malaysian context, it is the Malays who should be appointed as the leaders in the highest position as they possess the necessary *assabiyyah* qualities, which are sentiments on heredity and religion. It must also be guided by Islam due to its nature as a way of life, that teaches its followers to do good and promote justice and to abstain from doing acts of injustice and discrimination, denying rights as well as other bad practices towards other races. In addition, the Muslim *ummah* especially those of the Malay race who are known for being the majority Muslim group in Malaysia, must also realise that racial sentiment should never overcome that of their religion. Even though the national spirit in Malaysia does not amount to the level of nationalism promoted by the Western secular groups (Mohamed, 1984: 154-161), as an *ummah* who share the same *aqidah*, Muslims must realise that a brotherhood based on *aqidah* is of and utmost importance rivalling that of any other relationships related to race, ethnic group, and skin colour. This kind of brotherhood is also universal. Therefore, there should be no issue such as Indian Muslims who feel like outcasts among their own Muslim brothers, just because they are Indians and not Malays. The same applies to the concerns of non-Muslims who would

like to embrace Islam but fear being labelled as ‘becoming Malay’ and having to change their names to Malay names (Hafiz Firdaus, 2008: 14).

### **The political concerns of Malay muslims**

The highest leadership positions in Malaysia are held by Muslims. However, there are also non-Muslim cabinet members in the government nowadays. In the past 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, this is not strange and is in fact encouraged. For example, in Islamic history Christians were known to have been given certain posts in the Abbasid government such as the Executive Ministers. It is permissible as long as the post is not related to Muslim matters. In addition, the unique political phenomenon in Malaysia is that the population count of non-Muslims amounts to nearly the same numbers as Muslims. They are no longer considered as *zimmi*, which refers to protected non-Muslims such as have been described in classic Muslim political works (Mohd Rumaizuddin, 2004: 192-195). However, what is more important is the *akhlaq al-karimah* that a leader possesses, regardless of his religion. In fact, it would be truly unfortunate if the ruling Muslim leaders practice negative acts which are contrary to the principles of *syaria*. Ibnu Khaldun himself fought for the idea that political power is not the ultimate goal of humans, but a tool for achieving ambition, morality and humanity. The moral values practiced by the leaders will be the cornerstone of the effectiveness of his leadership according to Islamic philosophical thinking. There are scholars who disclosed the negative practices that could destroy Islamic leadership. Bribery, the money and politics syndrome, selfishness, excessiveness, excessive centralisation of power and others such practices can lead to the decline of a country. This is what is taking place in Malaysia today. After the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election, these practices have become even more common among both those holding higher and lower posts. In fact, the Anti-Corruption Agency now known as Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC) has had too much on its hand to handle. The root of the problems is that Muslims fail to make evaluations and choose to follow leaders whose capabilities of protecting the Islamic honour are questionable. A leader should be able to demonstrate good morals that can be followed by his people, such as what was done by Umar Abd Aziz during his ruling era (Ahmad Zaki, 2005: 112).

In Malaysia, there are a number of political parties which are spearheaded by Malay Muslims: UMNO, PAS and KeADILan. Each party fights for different ideologies and principles. However, what we should look for is a meeting point between the parties in the interest of Islam, in which they must put aside their political sentiments and unite under the name of Islam. UMNO, for example, fights for fate of the Malays and the Malay race, as well protecting the rights of the indigenous groups since its inception. The revival of the fight against the colonial rulers has helped those fighting for the nation and those fighting for religion to be in the same line. They stood up to fight because of the love for their religion, race and country. Therefore, the history of the fight for Malay survival has a close relationship with their Islamic ambitions (Mohd Rumaizuddin, 2004). However, after 50 years of ruling the roost, along the way UMNO seems to have turned to fighting mainly for the cause of Malay rights, without a lot of consideration for Islamic matters. This difference in ideology is what separates UMNO and PAS. In fact, today UMNO is seen as incapable of fighting for and protecting the rights of the Malay people, due to the increasing turmoil it faces. Finally,

it can be said that the 12<sup>th</sup> General Election has become the measuring stick for UMNO's failure as a party that fights for the cause of the Malays.

On the other hand, PAS has also gone through its own political ups and downs. Finally, it was decided that the party is indeed one that aims to protect Islam and fight for the Islamic way of life which provides security to all people regardless of race, ethnicity and skin colour. Once, PAS's outspokenness in stating its aim to form a 'Muslim country' may have more or less frightened the non-Muslims who do not have a clear understanding of Islam. However, today PAS has begun to use a more effective approach, and finally succeeded in getting the support of non-Muslim voters. One of the approaches used by PAS is organising a *tahalluf* with the non-Muslim, in order to reach a point of understanding. Therefore, the meeting point that was reached by the parties under Pakatan Rakyat, built by PAS, KeADILan and DAP is to fight for justice and the rights of the people, and against unjust acts like ISA, fraud and others. Apart from this, PAS no longer declares its intention to form a 'Muslim country', but instead follows Rasulullah's example strived to build on issues that became the building blocks of a Muslim country, without mentioning the term itself (Husam, 2008: 3). Perhaps due the growing feeling that it should fight for the cause of both the Malays and Islam, UMNO invited PAS to a meeting called the *Muqabalah*, which PAS felt was in accordance with Allah's commands in Surah al-Anfal, (verses 61-63). PAS used this opportunity to give its views on what was hoped to lead towards a paradigm shift of the country's leadership, which can cause a political change that could bring peace to its people. However, all efforts to unite UMNO and PAS was impossible and rejected by PAS. The Muslim *ummah* once again faced problems when this issue was politicised.

A statement by Anwar Ibrahim, the advisor of KeADILan, in which he said that PR planned to form a government on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008, shocked the country. In fact, it may even have caused the country's politics to become chaotic. Some were happy, while others were worried about the direction the country would take in the future. The Muslims' *ummah* concern was whether Islam would continue to be protected and upheld. This was what worried PAS, the party which is said to fight under the banner of Islam. Even though they are under the same movement named PAKATAN, there are still elements of doubt in naming the advisor of KeADILan as the country's leader. Previously, Anwar had stated his intentions of protecting the rights of the Malays, as well as that of Islam, and in accordance with what has been established in the Constitution, to bring peace to other races and to not ignore their rights for the sake of the Malays and Islam. On the other hand, PAS wants to protect Islam, and if this goal could not be achieved it would insist on reviewing its lace in PAKATAN (Husam, 2008). However, on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008, Anwar Ibrahim did not form a new government as the rumours had predicted, and was said to have postponed his intention to a yet to be announced date. Nonetheless, Muslims are still about the correct choice that they must make, as they do not know who will really protect the dignity of Islam. There are certainly Muslims who hope that a new government would really be able to uphold Islam, while the country's multiracial communities may once more be able to live peacefully under the Islamic rule like they once did. What is certain is that after the 12<sup>th</sup> General election, the country's politics issues has become the main topic of discussion and has not stopped being the number one agenda in the country. It seems that the aftermath of the GE12 was so great that all political parties cannot sit still in

order to revive from any weaknesses and to strengthen what qualities they had. However, questions remain among the Muslims, on whether this scenario would help to improve their welfare, or is able to fix any weaknesses faced by the Muslim *ummah* especially in terms of their economy, society and others. This is indeed the real problem faced by Muslims in Malaysia today.

### Conclusion

The concern of Malay Muslim community in Malaysia after 2008 general election is concentrated on the future of Islam itself. The political situation in Malaysia is moving towards a new era, which enables the people to find a more ideal point to address this issue. Malaysians becomes more open and have begun to understand their rights, leading them to freely choose a government that can guarantee their safety and well-being. This will help the people and the country to become more stable in the future. It would also be necessary to refer to religious experts so that the existing government will be closer to achieving what has been built by the Prophet PBUH in multi-religious society in Madinah. Issues that are contrary to the teachings of Islam must be handled properly. Some of the issues should not be openly debated on, but should instead be discussed behind doors by experts to avoid misunderstanding of the public.

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