

Remarks

YB Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein

“Multiculturalism and Nation Building in Plural and Divided Societies: Constitutional Experiences”

*by Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Hj Shad Saleem Faruqi
Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at ISIS Malaysia*

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Bismillahirrahmani Rahim.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh dan Salam Sejahtera.

Menghadap Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Sultan Perak Darul Ridzuan, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah ibni Almarhum Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah Al-Maghfur-Lah, Royal Fellow, Institut Kajian Strategik dan Antarabangsa (ISIS) Malaysia.

Ampun Tuanku.

Patik sekeluarga dengan penuh hormat dan takzimnya merafak sembah menjunjung setinggi-tinggi kasih di atas limpah perkenan Duli Tuanku sudi mencemar duli berangkat ke majlis pada hari ini. Sesungguhnya keberangkatan Duli Tuanku amat besar ertinya kepada patik sekalian.

*Tuanku selalu mencemar duli,
Menziarahi rakyat, bantuan diberi,
Rakyat gembira, tiada terperi,
Kebaikan Baginda lekat di hati.*

*Sejarah kesultanan patut dihayati,
Dipelajari oleh generasi terkini,
Personaliti Raja amat dikagumi,
Kemana pergi tetap dihormati.*

Ampun Tuanku, Patik mohon limpah perkenan Duli Tuanku untuk patik turut mengalu-alukan kehadiran tetamu yang lain.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I begin, allow me to apologise on behalf of YB Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein who is unable to make today's event due to prior engagements abroad. I, Rhiza Ghazi, will be delivering the following remarks on behalf of my uncle and the Tun Hussein Onn family.

*The topic today "**Multiculturalism and Nation Building in Plural and Divided Societies**" is very close to my uncle's heart, and he truly wanted to personally deliver these remarks in the presence of Duli Tuanku as he is aware that they both share similar beliefs, concerns, and a sense of responsibility and moral obligation on the matter.*

Being a mere representative, I know I will not do justice to my uncle delivering these remarks today, but I will try to do my very best.

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa,
Chairman and Chief Executive of ISIS Malaysia.

Yang Berbahagia Datin Paduka Dr Faridah Abdullah,
Chairman of the Noah Foundation.

Yang Berbahagia Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Hj Shad Saleem Faruqi,
Fourth Holder of the Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at ISIS Malaysia.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. Allow me to firstly begin by congratulating YBhg Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Hj Shad Saleem Faruqi on his appointment as the Fourth Holder of the Tun Hussein Onn Chair, and on behalf of the Tun Hussein Onn family, we warmly welcome

him here to this year's public lecture. Your presence and speech today means a lot to us all, bearing in mind my late father's longstanding ties with ISIS Malaysia and timely with the fact that we have just recently celebrated the 56th anniversary of the formation of Malaysia and the 62nd anniversary of Merdeka.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

MULTI-CULTURALISM IN A CHANGING GLOBAL AND DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT

2. Malaysia and the world is changing. Globalization has brought new challenges. Borders are breaking down. Multi-fold shifts in technology and societal behaviours are changing the way we live and communicate. In short, we are living in an age of uncertainty, a world vastly different from that of the late Tun Hussein Onn's. Uncertainties are the only certain fixture that we have to live with. Day by day, the nature of challenges evolve rapidly, outpacing our abilities to search for solutions. We now find ourselves in a paradox—of feeling insecure, trapped yet exposed in the borderless *“global village”* which presents limitless opportunities yet one which is also punishingly complex. Furthermore - the only thing constant in life and our world today is change. Referring to the saying *“The more things change, the more they stay the same”*. While everything may appear to be different - it was, and always will be, part of the same picture, the bigger, ambiguous, picture, which remains the same throughout time. Yet the irony is, this progress that we have achieved in the fields of science and technology, is not matched by the progress in uniting societies and understanding one another better.
3. While some talk about eradicating barriers globally, a great many are building walls, whether literally or within themselves. Indeed, this presents a great challenge to the ideal of celebrating multi-culturalism. What is supposedly a good and desirable virtue - understanding and celebrating diversity of traditions, ideas and heritage, can easily be misunderstood and perceived wrongly by certain segments of the society. Such is the harsh reality of our country today. The

battle to build greater understanding between different cultures in plural societies are met with push backs from misunderstood groups looking to advance narrow interests often augmented by extreme views.

4. It happens everywhere- look around us today, We cannot deny that our country is once again facing very deep and dire challenges. There is a real fear, despite the leaps and bounds our economy has made since the days of our forefathers, that issues such as inequality and social justice will need to be addressed swiftly. Also, the struggle to build an integrated and united Malaysia continues. More often than not, it seems like the odds are stacked against us. If there ever was a time that leaders need patience, courage, wisdom, sincerity and a stomach of steel, it is now. Leaders must understand cool heads and measured words may not grab headlines, but they are more likely to contribute to a future of peace and prosperity. It may not excite your followers. But it will do more to create a world which our children and grandchildren will be grateful to be living in. In the months and years to follow, there may be many incidents where lashing out will seem like the easiest option for leaders. Indeed, these will come again and again. But if we sincerely care about the future of Malaysia and her children, then these are the hardships that we must bear. To work patiently, to unite our fractured world, to heal the divide, and to endure whatever tomorrow will bring.
5. We must admit that Malaysia's interracial and inter-religious identity is fracturing. Suddenly, the unity in diversity which we have been advocating and promoting all this while, feels painfully difficult to attain. I sincerely believe that the distrust sown by the politics of hate must stop. Enough is enough. We must stand firm in rejecting the toxicity of hate politics if we are to nurture the fertile ground of understanding in a multi-cultural society. If we are to buck the trend, we must

heed the lessons from our unique experience in nation-building- for clearly, so much is at stake if we don't.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

LEADERSHIP AND REMEMBERING TUN HUSSEIN ONN

6. However, we would be doing the memory of Tun Hussein Onn and those of our other national heroes a great disservice if we were to throw up our arms and wallow in self-pity. Malaysia, like Tun Hussein was and is, a nation of doers. We are eternal optimists and world beaters. Moreover, our national heroes would never want us to dwell on the past, much less be afraid of the future. What we can do is to take inspiration from their lives and find ways to forge ahead. Indeed, all is not lost if we have the leadership and courage to act on our convictions. In testing times such as this, we can draw inspirations from the leadership of the late Tun Hussein Onn. He once wrote :- *“When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity.”*
7. While our nation's third Prime Minister is my father, he was first and foremost a leader who believed in every essence of Malaysia and its multi-cultural strength, earning him the endearing title of Father of Unity or Bapa Perpaduan. Whether it was in the army, the legal fraternity or later in politics: as a Cabinet minister, Deputy Prime Minister and then Prime Minister, he had but one goal: to see Malaysia become a nation that was free and independent, prosperous and united. Leading in those circumstances required courage and integrity, rooted in his strong values and principles as a Malay patriot and a committed Malaysian, someone who understood that nothing of value was attained without sacrifice. I wonder at times if these values and principles are still relevant today, and if we were to truly embrace what our forefathers championed, would we be in a better situation?
8. Nelson Mandela also once said “Anybody, who changes his principles depending on whom he is dealing with – that is not a man who can lead a nation”. Mandela

also went further to say that humility is one of the most important qualities which you must have because if you are humble, if you make people realise you are not a threat to them, then people will embrace you, then people will listen to you. This humility and sincerity needs to be reminded, reiterated and reinforced on our present leaders, beyond racial, religious and party lines. Tun Hussein led the country, in what he thought was the best way: inclusive and always with the nation's best interest at heart.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. I have touched briefly on some of what I think were then the more important values and lessons my late father championed on our topic today. It was clear that a level head and a steady hand were needed, and the government that he led provided a significant measure of both. Tun Hussein forged a course of peace and stability that enabled the country to grow, develop and prosper for the decades to come with unity as a key component for Malaysia's success. This is I feel is a very important component as we navigate these uncertain times to reach a future that Malaysia deserves.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

MULTI-CULTURALISM: MODERATE ISLAM

10. Malaysia, as you all know, is a Muslim-majority nation and as an Ummah we are sadly saddled with insecurities. As Muslims, some of us are at times stuck with romanticism of the glorious past- the days of vast empires and great innovations and mastery of science and technology that we fail to use the opportunities to recreate the same history. Of course, solving the problems facing us will not be easy.
11. When the going gets tough, most people turn to faith for answers and solutions and Islam teaches us the importance of unity and that in a polarized society, the true teachings of Islam - **one which is compassionate and moderate - may also provide the way forward in bringing us all together.** Islam in its truest form is inclusive and promotes harmony. Therefore, it is imperative that the true face of Islam prevail and be included as part of the mainstream narrative - not

a competing one, in forging a more united Malaysia. This is often something that is ignored or dismissed by those who advocate multi-culturalism, when in fact, it is the key to our stability, peace and harmony.

12. The results may not come overnight, or even in our lifetimes. But we have the opportunity to lay the groundwork for a better future. Muslim countries are not Muslim if they are divided and unjust. It is true that we owe duties to Allah SWT, but we also have duties to our fellow human beings. There is no way that we can claim to be discharging the former credibly if we neglect the latter. The most perfect and visible service to the Almighty is by serving each other, regardless of race, religion and creed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. This public lecture is therefore timely. But it must be reminded that multiculturalism, unity and nation building are not the sole responsibility of Government. Ordinary citizens like us must all do our part. Let us try our best, to complete Tun Hussein Onn's vision. Let us reflect on the state of race relations in the country, and strive to do better, to heal the deep wounds of division and forge a united and prosperous future ahead. It is now for us to dedicate ourselves to the unfinished work he has graciously started. We must carry the torch forward. We must leave a better Malaysia and a better world to our children and grandchildren. We must be worthy of Tun Hussein Onn's legacy. But I also believe that it lives on in every Malaysian, whether we realize it or not. While each generation has its own heroes, the truth is that- they walk in the trails blazed by those before them. Malaysia's journey is far from complete. But with God's blessings and the example of icons like Tun Hussein Onn, we will reach our destination safely and in glory.

Ampun Tuanku.

14. Sekianlah sahaja sembah ucapan patik. Patik sekali lagi bagi pihak keluarga Allahyarham Tun Hussein Onn dengan penuh hormat dan takzimnya merafak

sembah menjunjung setinggi-tinggi kasih di atas limpah perkenan Duli Yang Maha Mulia Tuanku sudi mencemar duli berangkat ke majlis pada hari ini.

Ampun Tuanku.