



The Election of Halimah Yacob is NOT a Victory for Malay nor for Women, and nor for Islam!

The election of Halimah Yacob - a woman of ethnic Malay Muslims as President of Singapore mid-September, was overwhelmed by some secular circles in Indonesia who used this news attacking Muslims in order to accept being led by a minority. Malaysia is a Muslim country that has a long history with Singapore in terms of friction of Malay and Chinese racial identity. On September 11th, Halimah Yacob was declared as the only eligible candidate to become president without a vote. In addition to scoring history as the first woman to become President of Singapore, Halimah also listed herself as President of the first Malay community in the last 47 years. It is known that at present, Singapore's population comprises 74 percent of the Chinese community, 13 percent of the Malay community, 9 percent of the Indian community and the rest 3.2 percent for other communities.

A member of PSI (Partai Solidaritas Indonesia), Dr Surya Tjandra, stated, "They (Indonesian) are mostly amazed at how a minority — a Muslim woman — can be in such a high position, especially compared with the fact that many Indonesians are misled by some Islamists that having minority backgrounds like being Chinese or non-Muslim are 'foreigners' and women cannot become leaders," said Dr Tjandra. Mdm Siti Mariah, Malaysia's opposition Islamic party Amanah, also took to Facebook to congratulate Mdm Halimah, saying she is "an iconic image that emphasises harmony and stability" at a time when the world is still "struggling with regressive issues regarding women and Islamophobia." (TodayOnline.com, 20 September)

This misleading view needs to be studied and criticized by getting to know who Halimah really is and to know her identity of idealism. It is a fact that Halimah Yacob, in her first speech, called her new role as a proud moment for Singapore, also for multiculturalism and multiracialism. Halimah is a loyal cadre of the PAP (People Action Party), the party which was created by Lee Kuan Yew - a Chinese Peranakan (Chinese ethnic descent), a former 7-period Singapore prime minister, dubbed Singapore's father of development. This political background made her also known to be actively campaigning against radical Islamic groups. **Therefore, it is worthy of us to question; is it true that Halimah Yacob is a victory for Malay, women and Islam? There are two most prominent issues of this Halimah Yacob story: the first is the issue of ethnic Malay as a minority in Singapore, and the second is the alignment of Islam in Singapore.** In this case, the matter of woman leadership is less prominent. Add to this the fact that Halimah Yacob is only a President, while Singapore is a parliamentary system; the real ruler is the Prime Minister. The president as head of state has a ceremonial and politically barely functioning power.

This article will discuss two prominent issues from this Halimah Yacob phenomenon, one by one, in the hope that Muslims in Southeast Asia can take a great lesson from their history in the region. Muslims in the region need to know Singapore's political history since the era of the British colonialism when the Chinese ethnicity was imported by imperial Britain to the Tumasek land, until the cold war era when the political forces of Peranakan (a Chinese ethnic descent) have emerged in Singapore to marginalize Muslim Malays.

NOT Malay Victory

Halimah's victory was claimed to be the winning for Malays as she was representing the Malay community and then won by a landslide. But is it true that Singapore really sided and supported the Muslim Malay? The answer can be taken from Lee Kuan Yew – whose leadership in Singapore has long been supported by the United Kingdom and the United States since the beginning.

Lee Kuan Yew's leadership emerged as a socio-political power in Singapore, and he was very vocal against Malay sovereignty politics, so that in the end, Singapore was expelled from the Malaya federation of the 1960s. The strong political dominance of the peranakan Chinese has long historical roots of Singapore's annexation as a British colony. Singapore is the only area of the Malay lands that is released into the hands of foreign nations with no resistance at all because of the betrayal of the Johor Sultan who sold Singapore to British-led Thomas Stamford Raffles in Asia at that time. Singapore was then shaped by Britain and became a trading locus in Asia by slowly marginalizing Malay Muslims through British migration politics that brought large amount of the Chinese ethnicity on the Tumasik land. Britain took advantage of China's domestic situation at that time which was ravaged by the Opium war. As a result, the time span 1824-1860 has increased eight-fold population in Singapore, where the Chinese ethnicity was the fastest growing group.

In relation to this historical fact, Ma'mun Murod AlBarbasy, Ph.D. in political science from the University of Indonesia (UI), analyzed the election of Malay and electing a Muslim President to Singapore. He thinks that the elections are more dominantly driven by the political motive of maintaining the interests of the Lee Kuan Yew (Lee Hsien Loong) regime rather than accommodating the interests Malays and particularly Muslims in Singapore. Especially since its establishment, Singapore has always been led by the Chinese Prime Minister, and there has never been a Prime Minister from other ethnic groups.

Definitely not a Victory of Islam!

Siti Muslikhati – a lecturer of Islamic political studies from Muhammadiyah University in Yogyakarta- and during a forum of Muslimah political discussion, organized by the Muslimah Nekarawan Institute on October 16, stated "*we must be pessimistic that Halimah Yacob will struggle for the interests of Muslim Ummah,*" judging from her political background Halimah is Lee Kuan Yew's cadre, who temporarily quit the PAP because of the requirements of the presidential candidate. Siti Muslikhati also asserted that Halimah was appointed because the stakeholder in Singapore considered her as a part of majority and against radical Islam, and is much smoother as she is publicly Muslim but her thoughts can be controlled. "*How can we expect the adoption of Islamic interests through the way of compromising Islam with the secular idea? And how can anyone who struggles for Islam be accepted into the Democratic System?*" she concluded in the discussion.

Halimah Yacob is one example of Singapore's hard effort to integrate Muslims into their non-Islamic political systems. They hope that by doing so they will be able to draw Muslims away from following Islam as a comprehensive ideology that includes ruling, economics and other systems of life. At the same time, they hope that having Muslims in their government structures will help them to obscure the secular-western agenda of attacking Islam. Lee Kuan Yew once expressed his controversial view of Singapore Muslims in the book *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*. Lee asserted that Muslims in Singapore are facing difficulties integrating due to their obedience to Islamic teachings, and he was urging Muslims to become less strict in Islamic observance. "***I would say today, we can integrate all religions and races except Islam,***" Lee said in his book.

The former British colony, Singapore, has become part of the US ally since the post-cold war. Singapore is very active contributing directly to support the anti-Islam project and counter-terrorism. Singapore is even very repressive against Muslims which it considers radicals. Here are some examples: the preacher certification program, the limitation for Muslim call to prayer (adzan call), including deporting foreign Islamic students who are considered committed to the development of da'wah in Singapore. This is not strange, given the identity of the country's founders who sided with the imperialist Western powers from the beginning. Lee Kuan Yew even once said that Islam is a 'venomous religion', this is one of the 700 leaked documents dating from the US Embassy in Singapore as Wikileaks reported.

Sheikh Abu Usamah - a Muslim scholar from Palestine - once said Singapore is a Southeast Asian "Israel" where ethnic non-Muslims are raised and kept pinched among the wealthy Muslim countries. Modern Singapore was transformed into a great capitalist power which was designed in such a way, facilitated by military power and supplied by economic capital, in order to weaken the power of Islam in the region. The United States even placed its military base in Singapore. According to Lee Kuan Yew himself, he imitated the Zionist state of "Israel" in developing his country. Lee does have a close relationship with Zionist "Israel" for a long time. Whereas the poor land of Singapore has one benefit of geographical position alone, the rest of Singapore is only a diminutive country which is highly dependent on Muslim countries, for example clean water from Malaysia and environmental support from Indonesia.

Important Lessons for Southeast Asian Muslims

Halimah Yacob and Singapore's political history should provide important lessons for Muslim countries in Southeast Asia - particularly Indonesia and Malaysia- that the dominant role of the Western colonial powers is to marginalize Muslims and to undermine the power of Islam in the region and this has been invested since more than a century ago. Malay Muslims must be aware of the deadly consequences of their submission to the hegemony of Western countries, and the ignorance of the Islamic teachings will only lead them to deterioration and disunity and they will be marginalized in their own land. Other important lessons are:

1. True leadership for the ummah is not measured from outward appearance of the figure only, but the ummah must deeply observe his/her identity of ideology and to whom his loyalty is given

2. Muslims need to be more literate in the Islamic teachings regarding governing, the political system, and the qualifications of candidates which meet the qualifications of state leaders in the view of Islam, then the contrast between the Islamic political system with the secular system of democracy or the nation-state system.

3. Countering the Islamophobic environment in the societies we live cannot be achieved through engaging in a system whose sanctions even promote the expression of Islamophobic venom.

4. The way to secure a better future for Singaporean Muslims is therefore not to discard our Islamic values in order to be accepted by the political system of Singapore but rather to adhere firmly to our Islamic beliefs and to dominate the discussions and debates about our Deen in our societies with the truth.

Remember that Allah (swt) says:

﴿وَدُّوا لَوْ تُكْفُرُونَ كَمَا كَفَرُوا فَتَكُونُونَ سَوَاءً فَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا مِنْهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ حَتَّىٰ يُهَاجِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ﴾

"They wish you would disbelieve as they disbelieved so you would be alike. So do not take from among them allies until they emigrate for the cause of Allah..." [An- Nisa: 89]

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