

The Polemic Trap of the Islamic State

News:

Soon six states in Malaysia will hold elections for their respective State Assembly Members. As usual, we are now witnessing the war of words between competing political parties. Plethora of issues have been raised with the aim of destroying the credibility of the opponents. Among the issues played is concerning the status of Malaysia - is it secular or otherwise. In response to the opposition's accusation that the 'Madani' government's ally, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), is fighting for secularism, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim stressed that his government rejects this allegation. According to Anwar, the concept of laicite secularism, which is the view of totally rejecting religion in the national administration, is not accepted by the people and his unity government. Anwar also claimed that the special position of Islam as the official Federal Religion and the establishment of State Religious Departments and religious leaders prove that Malaysia cannot be said to be a secular country.

Comment:

According to Anwar, as long as the country still has Islamic elements, even though it applies a system that does not come from Islam, Malaysia is not an absolute secular country. Secularism has been interpreted widely depending on one's point of view, but the basic meaning remains the same, which is to separate religion from human affairs and the state. The term 'absolute secularism' or any other terminology is not the issue - the fact remains secularism is still secularism. The philosophy behind secularism is the separation of religion from life. This understanding of secularism became dominant towards the end of the Dark Ages in Europe. European thinkers who support secularism hold that people have the full right to make any decisions in their lives without the influence of religious doctrines. Based on this concept, secularism glorifies human freedom in making decisions. In line with this, secularism defends the right to freedom of belief, freedom of opinion, freedom of ownership and personal freedom of man. It is this idea of secularism that gave rise to Capitalism which dominates the world today, including the Muslim world after the collapse of the *Khilafah* (Caliphate) State in 1924.

The polemic of Malaysia being an Islamic or secular country basically revolves around the discussion of Article 3 of the Constitution which allocates Islam as the Federal Religion. In addition, the polemic is also affected by the fact that there are clear manifestations of Islamic elements such the abundance of mosques and Islamic institutions in this country. There are also those who see this country as an Islamic country based on the fact that the majority of people in this country are Muslims and it is led by Muslim leaders. And there are those who state that Malaysia is a secular country but still manifest elements of Islam - in line with the views presented by Anwar. From these perspectives, we observe that secularism is continuously "softened" so that the idea is acceptable for Muslims and the non Islamic system that grips their lives today can be maintained through the "application" of Islam and its teachings in a partial and incomplete manner.

If we trace the history of the formation of this country, it is blatantly clear that secularism was the basis of its formation from the very beginning. Based on the Reid Commission report, which forms the basis of the Malaysian Federal Constitution, it is stated that the position of Islam as the Federal Religion does not change the fact that this country is a secular country. In the White Paper issued by the British government in June 1957 right after the London Conference which took place on 13-21 May 1957, it was clearly stated that "...there has been included in the proposed Federal Constitution a declaration that Islam is the religion of the Federation. This will in no way affect the present position of the Federation as a secular state..."

This polemic will continue to be echoed by politicians in order to gain political mileage and be used to attack their political enemies. Each will make the effort to tarnish the credibility of their opponent in the eyes of the majority Malay-Muslim voters. The fact remains, whichever party wins this democratic election, the inherited British constitution that was engineered to ensure that Muslims in this country continue to be governed by the colonial model, will still hold. Secularism, in any form, must be rejected and replaced by the application of Islamic principles in a complete manner. It is totally inappropriate for any Muslim, especially from amongst the leaders, to make excuses in justifying secularism and the application of kufr system in this nation and the Muslim world in general.

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