

Pluralism and the Hadhari concept

By YONG HUEY JIUN

The International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, to be launched tomorrow, seeks to promote better understanding of Islam Hadhari and its vision for development and progress. Its chairman and chief executive officer, Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali, tells YONG HUEY JIUN how the broader civilisational principles of Islam offer a way forward.

Q: What are the policy recommendations that have been formulated under Islam Hadhari?

A: Policy implementation in the areas of cultural and moral integrity, for example, has been to reinvigorate the activities of the Anti-Corruption Agency and pursue earnestly the path against corruption in Malaysia.

One of the sub-themes of Islam Hadhari is the rigorous approach to the mastery of knowledge. In this regard, there have been developments in universities like Institut Islam Hadhari, introduced in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia last year. The International Islamic University has also created a research unit on Islam Hadhari.

The idea of civilisational Islam is to engage in the broader universal principles of Islam to create a better environment for pluralism and social harmony.

The general purpose of governance in Islam is to realise welfare and service delivery for the benefit of the people. Valid as they may be, the Islamic discourse we have had in recent times has instead engaged in ideological issues, syariah-related themes and legalities.

Q: How can Islam Hadhari be implemented in a multi-ethnic environment like Malaysia's?

A: One of the objectives of civilisational Islam is to generate space or greater acceptance of the realities of pluralism -- religious pluralism, cultural pluralism and understanding each other's cultural identities, traditions and values.

Islam recognises pluralism, clearly. But the challenge of pluralism is, admittedly, greater here because the barriers of religion also coincide with ethnic barriers. In other countries, Christians, Hindus and Muslims belong to the same ethnic group. Here, they are divided not just by religion but also by race and ethnicity.

We need to address this in schools. It's a long-term agenda. We're teaching Islamic Civilisation as a subject. One thing we can do is to integrate the perspectives of civilisational Islam into the course of a programme.

Q: The 10th component principle of Islam Hadhari is strong defence capabilities. Please elaborate.

A: Defence capabilities are not confined to the protection of security, independence and territorial integrity of a country. It also means that we develop our defence mechanism to equip ourselves against the kind of corrupting influences and challenges that affect us in our daily lives, such as in the area of administrative corruption.

Then there's the defence mechanism against the temptations in daily life -- drug addiction, alcoholism, gambling or other degrading activities. You ought to be able to look at your knowledge traditions, moral teachings and how you can develop your inner moral capabilities to resist these temptations.

Q: What has been the biggest misconception about Islam Hadhari?

A: The biggest misconception is concerning the terminology. Critics say Islam is one Islam and it does not take the qualification, as in civilisational Islam.

Others have said that Islam Hadhari is a new Islam, a new cult, even a worldly Islam. To them, civilisational Islam has the connotation of a new brand of Islam. They simply discredit it altogether.

But what about the substance of the 10 principles? All of these have strong credentials in the mainstream teachings in Islam.

The even more valuable message is one of civilisational harmony in alliance. We stand for values that bring humanity together. Cultural and moral integrity, good governance, balanced economic development, protection of the rights of minorities are common denominators of all major traditions and civilisations.

Q: Religion is often viewed as incompatible with the changing times, even though it has prevailed for so long. Why?

A: Every religion has a claim to self-contained structural values that we do not look beyond -- we look within. This idea of self-righteousness is present in every religion.

But every religion has different insights within itself. Islam recognises the validity and principles of Christianity, Judaism and of all revealed scriptures that came before Islam. There's a certain degree of openness.

If you were to look for a very important contribution of Islamic tradition, it's in the area of equality.

There's a saying from Prophet Muhammad: "All of you are from the same origin. Your God is one. Your ancestor Adam is one. There is no distinction of the red or of the black or over one another. The only level of distinction is moral uprightness and excellence."

In several verses of the Quran, we begin, "We created you from a single soul."

If you read these messages, there is simply no recognition of ethnicity as a basis of division. This is the message to clearly convey, not just at this time but at every time.