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Abstract The Malaysian experience of preventing violence by balanced reporting instead of inciting articles and advocating Liberal Islam as a part of developmental journalism should be extended across border now. The Malaysian media has a responsibility to continue advocating Liberal Islam in the domestic scenario and the world arena alike. Only then will it be successful in its quest for ensuring that the definitions of peace, terrorism and humanity are universal in its true sense.	

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Media, Culture & Politics in Malaysia: The Role of the Fourth Estate to Promote Liberal Islam

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Malaysia: Liberal & Modern

Malaysia has time and again been acclaimed as a liberal and modern Muslim nation, unique in its position of moderation and balance in the world order. The country consists of a diverse population of Malays, Chinese and Indians living harmoniously in a predominantly Muslim country. The Muslim population of the country lives peacefully with its multiplicity of religious groups, including Christians, Buddhists and Hindus. The different ethnic and religious communities live in peace, free to practice their own religion and customs without hindrance.

The resulting social and political stability has helped Malaysia to stand tall as a newly industrialized country and economic powerhouse in the region. The KLCC Twin Towers is a world landmark of today's world. Prior to the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis, the country had one of the fastest expanding economies in the region. The country has recovered from its recession ever since marching steadfastly towards its Vision 2020 to achieve the status of a developed country by that year. It is today the tenth largest trading nation of the world. In fact, the economy has grown for 30 years with an average of 7% annual growth, boasting carried agricultural and hi-tech manufactured good.

At a time of heightened world disorder, the continuing rapid economic development and remarkable social cohesion in Malaysia defies the conventional stereotype that all Muslim countries are violent, hostile and backwards. The country has successfully propagated a tolerant, modern and progressive version of Islam attuned to the changing times, allowing its multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups to live harmoniously in the pursuit of economic development. Representing a 'middle path' of moderation and a socio-economic model for harmony, stability and development, Malaysia emerged as a model for other Muslim countries during Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad's dynamic and visionary premiership.

Given the Fourth Estate its a key player in the social construction of reality, it is worthwhile to investigate the role of the Malaysian media to promote a liberal and modern version of Islam. The question may be posed as to what extent the Malaysia media played a constructive role within the realms of developmental journalism to encourage liberal Islam and encourage harmony. Today, Malaysia serves as an increasingly important position in the world arena as a leader of developing and Muslim countries, chairing both the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries and Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) simultaneously. Malaysia's standing in the world implies that its mainstream media deserves closer scrutiny to assess its ability to foster greater understanding and cooperation between the West and Islamic countries modeled on the social cohesion developed within the country itself.

The Malaysian media may hold the strategic opportunity to act as a conduit to bridge the differences between the West and East, particularly in light of the misconceptions and misgivings following the September 11th tragedy. In addition, the Malaysian media may be able to serve as a model to balance views and encourage moderation amongst the population in other Muslim countries. This is important because the media plays a pivotal role not only in the social construction of reality, but also reinforcing the values of moderation, tolerance and liberalism amongst the people.

Hypothesis & Methodology

Malaysia has been virtually left untouched by the wave of religious conflict and discord prevalent in the world during the past few years. Given its diverse ethnic and religious mix, Malaysia could have potentially seen violence and hostility between the various religious groups following September 11th. The country was able not only to prevent violence but also the resurgence of reactionary forces within the country. In fact, the first general elections following September 11th led to a resounding and landslide victory for the ruling Barisan National coalition subscribing to a liberal and modern version of Islam.

The electorate outright rejected the political parties associated with religious extremism, reducing their political power in both the federal and state constituencies. At a time of world conflict and resurgence of extremist politics across the globe, the

two-thirds majority and large vote margin of the ruling coalition was a message from the voters that Malaysia will remain in the liberal and moderate path advocated by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad and his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. This was in stark contrast to many other Muslim countries that witnessed extremist and religious chauvinistic political parties making major inroads to traditional voters following the seeming religious polarization amongst communities in the post-September 11th world order. Moreover, the Western diplomats in the country faced no serious threat or harms unlike other countries following the 9-11 tragedy and its aftermath.

Given the landslide victory of the ruling coalition and general harmony embodies the entrenched liberal and modern values of Islam in the majority of the country's population, it can be hypothesized that the Malaysian media plays a positive and balanced role in the social construction of reality and reinforcing the values of moderation amongst its people. The balanced stance and perspective of the Malaysian media in respect to international current affairs has resulted in the population of the country having the benefit of a broader world view instead of partisan communal understanding of events. This has helped the country prevent the resurgence of reactionary forces, including the extremist political parties aiming to establish a theocratic state as well as illegal paramilitary outfits posing danger to the country's national security. The balanced and objective reporting of the media has ensured that the external events in the world do not serve as incitement for violence within the country across communal lines. This can serve as a model for other Muslim countries to prevent the emotional arousing of violence. This balanced stance helps to develop a moderate worldwide view amongst its people. In addition, the moderate stance of the media can bridge a gap between the West and Islam thereby averting the so-called Clash of Civilizations predicted by Huntington.

In order to test the aforementioned hypothesis, this paper relies on a random survey of media reports, commentaries and op-ed pieces from the Malaysian mainstream media following September 11th to assess the role of the media to encourage balance and moderation instead of inciting communal violence within a framework of developmental journalism. The random survey is based on the national broadsheet New Straits Times. It has a long-standing tradition of being one of the most credible

dailies in the country. The question is posed as to what was the role of the Malaysian media during the sensitive time following September 11 to promote Liberal Islam, foster greater understanding between communities and avoid religious violence and whether this is adequate as a model for other developing Muslim countries in the current world order.

Developmental Journalism & Political Islam

The concept of developmental journalism refers to a doctrine that the Fourth Estate plays a constructive role in the development of a country, reporting and commenting in a manner that promotes social stability conducive to economic development instead of conflict and disunity. This implies that the mainstream media exercises discretion in the manner of reporting and commenting to ensure that the big picture of development and greater national good is not compromised. In the case of Malaysia following September 11, this implied that the media needed to provide a balanced perspective to ensure that the religious and ethnic cohesion and understanding continues to exist despite worldwide polarity and hostility. This is because the worldwide tension can only be avoided by illustrating a balanced picture that ensures objectivity without communal or religious bias, resulting in a broader worldview for the Malaysians. Under such circumstances, the Malaysian media's reporting of September 11 will be assessed to determine whether it created social stability and communal understanding in the pursuit of socio-economic progress as a part of the developmental journalism doctrine, thereby advocating Liberal Islam beneficial to the country.

New Straits Times & Post-September 11

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the United States on September 11th was the highlight of the media reports and op-ed pieces following the tragedy in Malaysia as well as the world alike. This is because rarely has a single incident in recent times caught the attention of the worldwide press as much. In Malaysia, the mainstream media's coverage of 9-11 and its aftermath attempted to give both sides of the stories, sympathizing with America's security concerns but also condemning the attack in Afghanistan. This was a balanced perspective that helped to strike a chord of moderation amongst the people who were able to understand the issue in broader terms than merely a simplistic black and white perspective. It

successfully prevented the arousing of emotions blindly sympathetic to either side, which could have led to internal violence in the country.

For the purposes of this paper, the reports and comments of media are discussed in eight separate themes that indicated the balanced and moderate stances taken by the New Straits Times:

Condemning Barbarism: In the immediate aftermath of the September 11th tragedy, the Malaysian media joined the worldwide chorus of unequivocal condemnation of the attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon. As columnist Askiah Adam (2001) wrote, the attack was a “barbaric act of unmitigated terror perpetrated by cold-blooded killers who have brought evil to a new, demonic high”. The writer even argued that such attackers don’t have a place in “modern democratic societies”. Abdul Kadir Jasin (2001) wrote in his weekly column, “our hearts goes out to the American people in their hour of tragedy” and stated that such terrorism “is an act of barbarism condemned by civilized society”. Shamsul Akmar (2001) felt such terrorism is a “horrendous” act while Abu Bakar (2000) empathized with the “pain and fear of the American people”. The fact that the NST vociferously condemned the 9-11 tragedy helped prevent the arousing of support for the tragic attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon and development of any dominant extreme worldview and anti-American or pro-Taleban attitude within the country. In the social construction of the tragedy, the NST was forthright to ensure that the Malaysians perceive the pain, fear and suffering of the American people encouraging sympathy for the victims irrespective of faith, instead of support merely across religious lines.

Soul-Searching: Immediately after the attack, there was rampant speculation regarding the individuals or organizations behind the attack. Intense soul-searching followed initial disbelief, as the world pondered how human civilization could be reduced to such inhuman tragedies. Unfortunately, the American media largely ignored the root causes of the tragedy, preferring to see the attack as a mere terrorist attack isolated from the geo-political scenario in respect to American foreign policy. The Malaysian media promoted a balanced perspective criticizing American foreign policy, despite the fierce condemnation of the tragedy and opposing such attacks as a strategy of resistance. Adam (2001) identified a number of factors that may have led

to anti-US sentiments worldwide, including American “inaction allowing renewed Israeli violence against unarmed Palestinian civilians, support of Israeli atrocities on the displaced and stateless, unfair terms of trade and global hegemony”. Columnist Aishah Ali (2001), stated that the American media needs to investigate why the devastation of September 11th happened. Though Aishah declared that she is “undoubtedly against terrorism”, she felt that the attack was a wake-up call, for Americans as multitudes feel grievances against the United States due to mishandling of foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East. She urged the US to find out which policies “might have caused such resentment, frustration and desperation”.

Some writers even blamed the US leaders directly as co-accused for the tragedy. Columnist J.K. Lee (2001) opined that the nearly 6,000 people who lost their lives on 9-11 were in fact “victims of the folly of American leaders and brutality of the terrorists combined”. He called upon American to “win the hearts and minds of the people” instead of relying merely on bullets and bombs. Johan Jaffar (2001) suggested that the strike in Afghanistan would not help foster greater understanding but merely result in further grievances. The Malaysia perspective was underscored by Sarah Sabaratnam (2001): “September 11th cannot be justified, whatever the cause. That is wrong and should be condemned. However, if foreign policy has been cited as the cause for the incident, then it needs to change”.

The Malaysian media’s criticism of the American foreign policy is symbolic of the balanced stance taken following September 11th. It is noteworthy that almost every single critique of the American foreign policy was also qualified by a unreserved and unconditional condemnation of the attack. The Malaysian did not condone violence and in fact vehemently condemned the attack, but at the same time suggested that some soul-searching is required on the part of both West and East to effectively stop recurrence of such human tragedies in the future. After all, the Malaysian government and media shared the concerns of the West to ensure extremists do not threaten national and regional security in South East Asia.

This allowed the Malaysian population to have a balanced and moderate stance, understanding the pain and sufferings of the tragedy but also feeling the need for a change in foreign policy to ensure that long-term world peace. Such balanced stances

helped the diverse population of Malaysia understand the complexities of the issue without passionate outbursts supporting or opposing the tragedy, which could have had negative effects for the social unity of the various religious groups living harmoniously in the country. The soul-searching attempted to see the bigger picture without unbiased stances, which is conducive to building a world of better understanding, peace and harmony.

Combating Extremism: The media played a pivotal role to differentiate between extremist and liberal Muslims. Representing the unique liberal Muslim perspective, the Malaysian media made great strides to absolve all Muslims of the collective guilt arising from the misdeeds of a few. This involved an attempt to distance misguided fanatics from liberal Muslims. According to Adam (2001), true believers “cannot perpetrate such cruelty” and that Muslims “cannot tolerate the inhumane sentiments that made possible the intended deaths of so many”. The writer comments that if “Islam is indeed the excuse for this act of extreme inhumanity, then no reasonable Muslim can applaud it”. Another columnist Shamsul Akmar (2001a) questions whether the cause of fanatics “is truly Islamic” as “killing, hostage-taking and armed rebellions killing innocents cannot be the teachings of the religion”. The Diarist (2001) in his column regretted that “innocent Muslims in the US and Europe have been bearing the brunt of an ugly backlash”, calling upon the world not to associate Islam and terrorism.

At a time when the wrongdoings of a few misguided zealots have equated Islam with terrorism in the eyes of many, the Malaysian media was able to play a constructive role to differentiate extremists with liberal Muslims. This was bound to create greater understanding between the various religious communities within the country, region and elsewhere as believers of other faiths were able to understand that Islam is not the cause but a lame excuse by the perpetrators of evil. The writers emphasized that the basic tenets of peace emphasized by the universal God in the religion’s verses in fact contravenes the violence perpetrated in the name of Islam. Given the potentially volatile demographic mix of various religious groups in Malaysia, such balanced stances separating Islam as a peaceful religion and violence perpetrated by misguided fanatics were helpful to avoid communal tension within the country. As Jaffar (2001) emphasized, “Islam has been hijacked by these people”. The Malaysian media

was able to play a vital role to ensure the population of the region understand that the terrorists are in fact exploiting religion for selfish political and heinous interests. This was bound to create better communal understanding by removing any suspicion of Islam and Muslims in the country, thereby leading to social stability.

Afghan Misery: Similar to the outpouring of sympathy and compassion for the victims of 9-11, the Malaysian media represented a balanced perspective expressing tremendous empathy with the victims in Afghanistan. The media condemned the 9-11 mayhem, but didn't refrain from standing by the side of humanity in respect to Afghanistan. The media urged for a multilateral approach to resolving international issues including Afghanistan under the banner of the United States instead of unilateralist action by the United States.

Though understanding America's reasons for retribution, the Malaysia media largely opposed a full-scale war. Columnists like Adam (2001) felt that such war was bound to lead to "unsavoury circumstances" in the form of "civilian misery". One writer Ashraf Abdullah (2001) questioned whether the attack of a state by another state can be tantamount to a form of terrorism too, thus giving credence to the view that two wrongs don't make one wrong right.

The balanced perspective by the Malaysian media showing empathy for both 9-11 and Afghanistan victims served as a message to the Malaysian population that humanity does not necessarily cut across religious lines. What is right or wrong cannot be determined only across the consideration of the religious identity of victims, but what is wrong for humanity as a whole. This also helped the Malaysians understand the complexities of the issue and adopt a moderate stance in respect to the current affairs in the world, sympathizing with the American but condemning the Afghanistan attacks due to the suffering of innocent civilian victims. This helped develop moderation in the country instead of extreme views, as the media enlightened the people that no side can be seen in shades of simplistic black or white.

The media emphasized that hapless Afghans were victims of both an oppressive Taleban regime and American aggression. As Sarah Giles (2001) emphasized, the people of Afghanistan were already being "abused, starved, maimed and killed" due

to the “cruelty and callousness of the Taliban which legitimized murder and subjugation”. The writers didn’t mince their words in condemnation of the Taliban, stressing that “Muslims wince in horror and shock at the way the Taliban has used a great religion like Islam to justify such cruelty and barbarism” and “no government that behaves with such cruelty and disdain against its own people has the right to continue to rule over them”. She feels that the Taliban has “unleashed their own peculiar version of death and destruction on the innocent people of Afghanistan” and ought to be “kicked out for terrorizing their own people”. However, such writers like Giles feel that air strikes will only lead to further “pain, fear, deprivation and death” for the Afghan population unless real change comes for them. As writer Vasanthi Ramachandran pointed out, “Killing innocent people who had nothing to do with terrorism is a victory to terrorists”. She argued that children should not be made victims of war and failed to “see the nobility of war despite grieving and mourning the American sorrow (or September 11th).

The Malaysian media feared that the attacks would merely lead to repeat cycles of violence. Johan Jaffar (2001) in his column argued that “the voice of reason should prevail as terror begets terror”. Jaffar reminded the US that the suffering of the people in Afghanistan may be another “battle cry for the militants” and “excuse for terrorists to wreak more havoc” akin to September 11.

The Malaysian media largely emphasized on the need for multilateral action instead of unilateral hegemonic actions by the United States. As Sarah Giles (2001) argued, it is more appropriate for countries representing the United Nations and Organization of Islamic Countries to unite in ousting regimes like Taliban but “butchering their own people and immolating their own nations”. Writer Datuk Mohamed Jawhar Hassan (2001) agreed and felt that the United Nations is the “best bet” for “justice to be done for the lives lost in America” ensuring there are “no excesses done in the name of freedom and justice on one hand, or Islam on the other”. Shamsul Akmar (2001a) underscored, “Malaysia is one nation that will never believe in the killing of innocents, Americans or Afghans” and thus “pulverizing Afghanistan is something as unpalatable to Malaysians as the September 11th attack”.

Such balanced and moderate perspectives helped create a fair and unbiased understanding of current affairs by the Malaysians. They were able to understand that

the attack on Afghanistan was just as wrong as the attack on September 11th, indicating that two wrongs don't make one wrong right. The journalists emphasized that the true success of the war against terrorism will only be possible by promoting consensus and fighting terrorism as one. Such consensus is vital to establish peace through greater understanding and cooperation of religious and ethnic groups in the world. The media helped the Malaysian population adopt a moderate worldview demonstrating that sympathies to American ought not to be necessarily equated to apologies for innocent victims of Afghanistan.

Opposing “Jihad”: Representing a balanced stance, the Malaysian media also called upon the Muslim world to do some soul-searching of its own. Columnists like Farish A. Noor (2001) explained that it has become “painfully clear that the Muslim world as a whole has lost its moral compass and sense of direction”. Noor believed that tragedies like September 11th are a result of “endemic crises in the Muslim world”, for which the Muslim world deserves as much blame as the West. Noor urged the world to understand that “vast power differentials and enormous cleavages of wealth” in the Muslim countries have led to a social divide and that those who feel themselves “marginalized and silenced by the structural inequalities shaping their political universe will rise up in revolt against the order”. In addition, he called for an effort for the Muslim world to understand other communities, as well as a need to ensure that Islam is not pit against non-Islamic. Noor suggested that Muslims need to be more “dynamic, open and inclusive” rather than being at odds with others.

In another article, Noor (2001a) was of the opinion that “Muslims in particular must realize that our true allies are those peace-loving advocates of democracy and justice in the West, and not the mullahs who call upon us to murder others in the name of our religion”. Some columnist disputed the legitimacy of fanatics calling for jihad, or holy war. Abdul Kadir Jasin (2001) in his weekly column he wrote that “not every Muslim calling for jihad has sufficient understanding of the religion. Jihad itself has been so badly corrupted by politics and fanaticism that it has lost its true meaning”.

Such balanced perspectives calling for the Muslims to do their own share of soul-searching along with the West is indeed praiseworthy as the Malaysian media can be seen to be leading the initiative amongst the liberal Muslim intelligentsia in the world

to cause a reform in the thinking, perspectives and ideology of the Muslim world as a whole. By asking the Muslim world to do its own soul-searching, the Malaysian media has effectively asked Muslims in the country and region to be open-minded, liberal and pluralistic in nature. Such perspectives essentially advocate Liberal Islam, providing an alternative Muslim voice that represents an open and liberal brand of Islam encouraging broadmindedness, tolerance and modernism. At a time when the antics of a few misguided fanatics has unfortunately put Islam into disrepute, such views assures the world that Osama bin Laden and his cohorts may not be representative of true Islam and the Muslim community. This has helped create social stability and reduce tension in both the country and the region.

The Local Threat: In the aftermath of the September 11th tragedy, the Malaysian media attempted to draw parallels with its own domestic political scenario. The perspectives of the Malaysian media reflected a sense of vulnerability shared by Malaysia and the world alike after the September 11 tragedy. The media expressed the sentiments that Malaysia should not sit idle knowing potential terrorist threats maybe brewing right under the country's nose. The media underscored that it is important for the population of the country, including Muslims to be aware of the terrorist, extremist and theocratic threats existing within its boundaries in the greater interest of peace and democracy.

Some columnists called upon the government to enact legislation to thwart fanatic terrorists in the domestic scenario. Farish A. Noor (2001b) argued that "if Muslims of the world want to do something about this crisis, they could do no better than to stop listening to the Mullahs who have brought them nowhere". In addition, the Malaysian media justified the existence of the Internal Security Act for the greater good of the country. According to columnist Harun Hashim (2001) justified the existence of the law and felt that "Internal Security Act 1960" has to remain on the statute books to combat terrorism in Malaysia". He suggested that other governments should also consider enacting such heavy-handed legislation to ensure there is an "effective machinery to detect, curb and prevent the commission of terrorist acts".

The stance taken by the Malaysian media was a reminder to its population that the country must remain committed to democracy and refrain from supporting extremists

in the name of religion. According to former Ambassador Abdullah Ahmad (2001)a, Malaysia must not turn to “extreme view or practices” and instead be committed to the principles of “moderation”. In addition, Fatimah Abu Bakar (2001) expressed a sense of “vulnerability” and that what happened on September 11th can happen anywhere. The Malaysian media attempted to create social and political stability by encouraging moderation instead of extremism, imploring upon the people that the reactionary forces should be resisted because they are a threat not only to the world, the multi-racial population of Malaysia but Muslims. The liberal Muslims should also play a proactive role in combating religious extremism. Such stances succeeded in making an impact on the Malaysian population, as evidenced from the 2004 general elections. The political parties associated with extremism and religious theocracy, were largely rejected by the Malaysians, including Muslim-majority states.

World Consensus: The Malaysian media hoped that the aftermath of September 11th will lead to greater world understanding, based on cooperation between the West and progressive Muslim countries. According to former diplomat Datuk Yusof Hasim, the September 11th attacks could be the “watershed” in relationship between US and Muslim countries, as the former is “more aware of its vulnerabilities and would be more disposed towards a balanced and fruitful relationship”. In an editorial (Editor, 2000), the NST argued that Malaysia’s “gentle strain of progressive Islam, consistent stand against terrorism, record in countering ideology-inspired militant extremism makes her the logical choice as one of the dominant parties in any coalition against terrorism”. Further, Kadir Jasin (2001a) hoped that America would understand that “the hearts and minds of the people must be won, the battle against terrorism cannot be won by military operations alone”. This implied that the post-September 11th world would need greater unity and understanding.

Some writers suggested US should take proactive efforts to ensure fanatics don’t have a war cry or cause. Zaharan Razak (2001) complimented America “as the epitome of human achievement” but at the same time hopes the country can reconstitute itself in terms of its “multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religion reality” to ensure that “the reasons of hate, the fertile soil for the Osamas of the world to grow, will be nullified”.

The Malaysian media's call for greater understanding and cooperation between various faith groups underscored the line that the definition of peace, humanity and terrorism are not society-specific but universal in nature. In fact such balanced perspectives negates Huntington's prophecy by calling for universal justice irrespective of religious identity. Farish Noor (2001) urged for the creation of a "meaningful alliance built on a common understanding of universal justice that united communities rather than driving them apart and against each other". The Malaysian media has successfully promoted the liberal Muslim stance that "civilization" is one and this sets the theme for future relationships between the Muslim world and other countries in the world. Such an attempt to establish consensus augurs well for the understanding between the various faith groups within Malaysian and the region, encouraging social and political stability.

American Osama: Though the Malaysian media remained largely silent on the guilt or innocent of Osama bin Laden, some columnists like K.P. Waran (2001a) suggested that the US government should make public the evidence gathered after the September 11th attacks to implicate Bin Laden and his coterie. The Malaysian mainstream media establishment nevertheless appeared to be strongly unsympathetic to bin Laden irrespective of his guilt or innocence in 9-11, given his fanatic credentials and suspected links with extremist parties within the country.

Interestingly, some writers accused US of creating fanatics like Osama. Writer Johan Jaffar (2000) echoed the sentiments of many who believes "Osama is undoubtedly the creation of American policy in the region", referring to the Cold War history.

The stance of the Malaysian media is once again promoting Liberal Islam, as it condemns terrorism and remains largely unsympathetic to Osama Bin Laden irrespective of his guilt or innocent in the New York tragedy due to his extremist credentials but at the same time asks Americans to rethink their foreign policy which helped create monsters as such. The Malaysian does not ignore the fact that Bin Laden was a creation of the West, something that the US and the world has to pay a price for today. Such balanced perspectives helped identify some causes of today's tragedies to take note in the interest of averting future tragedies and building peace on the basis of greater understanding between the West and Muslim countries. The

Muslims are encouraged to adopt a balanced stance that characteristically condemns Bin Laden irrespective of his specific guilt in 9-11, essentially imploring upon the people to resist political Islam. This has helped promote Liberal Islam in Malaysia encouraging Muslims to reject the political parties associated with extremism and created social stability under the Barisan National government.

Malaysian Media & Liberal Islam

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be concluded that the Malaysian media's reporting and comment on the September 11 and its aftermath advocated the liberal and modern version of Islam. It echoed the perspectives of liberal Islam by unequivocally condemning September 11th but also sympathizing with the victims of the Afghanistan attack; it condemned the terrorists without any hesitation but also asked the Americans to rethink their foreign policy implications; it asked the West to do some soul-searching, but at the same time asked the Muslims to do their fair share of soul-searching taking their blame for the state of the world; it resisted the Western attack on Afghanistan but also asked Muslims to resist the theocratic and fanatical forces like Bin Laden and Talebans; it didn't make any judgement on Osama Bin Laden's guilt but nevertheless expressed revulsion to his extremist activities; it condemned September 11th and Afghanistan but at the same time hoped for better world understanding in the future between the West and Muslim countries.

As discussed above, the media has successfully advocated and promoted liberal Islam. The progressive, modern and liberal version of Islam supported by the Malaysian media essentially fits into the realms of developmental journalism mentioned above. In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, moderation is imperative for social and political stability. The Malaysian media has successfully created a culture of moderation and balance amongst its people by its fair and unbiased reporting of both sides. This helped the people see the current affairs as complicated issues, instead of simplistic problems in the shade of black and white. The moderation results in political and social stability in the country, which is vital for harmony and economic development in pursuit of Vision 2020.

At a sensitive time such as the post-September 11th period, the Malaysian media played a very constructive role. The diverse demographic mix of the country in

respect to various faith groups implied that September 11th tragedy and its aftermath could have led to religious tension amongst the people. However, the Malaysian media lived up to its expectations of developmental journalism to promote Liberal Islam, thereby social and political stability instead of theocratic forces, which would lead to disintegration of the society. The results of the election that showed that the electorate prefers moderate parties instead of religious extremist political platforms shows that the Malaysian media has been successful to instil moderation amongst the population. Moderation is today deeply entrenched in the people's lives, which is why the aftermath of September 11th did not see any violence in Malaysia. The racial mix continues to live harmoniously, while foreigners roam freely without any fear or inhibitions. As agents responsible for the social construction of reality, the Malaysian media played a very important role by its balanced reporting and comments to instil moderate values amongst the population. This would only have been possible by the balanced perspective underscored by the media in its everyday reporting, defining humanity as one and universal instead of judgement based on partisan religious conceptions.

It is evident that the Malaysian media has helped create social and political stability in the country by advocating Liberal Islam, especially in the light of September 11th which could have led to volatility in the country if the reporting was irresponsible and incited religious passion against other groups. Given Malaysia's leading role in the world as the chair of both the NAM and OIC, the media could be a model to promote liberalism and moderation instead of extremism and theocracies. Just as Malaysia is today a model for other developing countries, the Malaysian media could be a model for the media in Muslim countries. The Malaysian media has definitely shown the way on how to encourage moderation instead of extremism, ensuring its reporting and commenting shows both sides of the story instead of one-sided biased perspectives that could arouse communal feelings and tensions.

In addition to encouraging the media in other Muslim countries to adopt similar to developmental journalism and progressive Islam for peace in the domestic and international arena, the Malaysian media could also serve as a conduit for greater understanding and cooperation between the West and Muslim countries. As explained earlier, Malaysia defies the stereotype of unsuccessful and hostile Muslim

countries. The Malaysian media has already played a pioneering step in promoting Liberal Islam, particularly distancing the average Muslim from the theocratic and extremists forces. This is indeed a very praiseworthy move, asking the Muslims to soul-search. This paper suggests that the Malaysian media should be at the forefront of the emerging liberal Islamic standpoints calling for a reform in the Muslim world towards open-mindedness, harmony and tolerance. The Malaysian media has already made the first move and it now needs to bring together the other liberal Muslim viewpoints from other countries. This will be possible by building partnerships with the media and civil society in other Muslim countries to ensure that Liberal Islam can be advocated successfully to the people of the world, including the West and Muslims.

The Malaysian media has successfully portrayed our country as a moderate, modern and progressive Muslim state. Moreover, it has encouraged and instilled values of Liberal Islam amongst its population. However, it must not stop here. According to the Society of Professional Journalists (2002), “public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. This has been done successfully in Malaysia by highlighting both sides of the story, as indicated by the 9-11 reporting and commenting. However, this needs to be extended to build partnerships with other Muslim countries and bridges with the West. As mentioned earlier, the Malaysian media has successfully promoted Liberal Islam as a part of developmental journalism in the domestic context, as evidenced from the portrayals of September 11th and its aftermath. The balanced reporting and differentiation between liberal Islam and extremists has succeeded in preventing the resurgence of extremist political parties for the greater good of the country. This is as important today under the capable leadership of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as it was under Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

The balanced objectivity accommodating perspectives of both West and East forms a good foundation for developing a multilateral consensus based on understanding and cooperation between both ends of the spectrum. Having played a largely objective role expressing both sides of the story but taking a principled stance on humanitarian grounds, Malaysian media’s call for soul-searching amongst the West as well as

Muslim intelligentsia may hold significance in promoting Liberal Islam and bridging the gap between both sides, ever so important in the light of the Iraq handover and need for world peace. It is imperative to organize greater exchanges amongst media publications in the world. This will help expand coverage of the balanced perspective by Malaysian media in the international arena, creating greater understanding, cooperation and cohesion amongst the different nationalities, ethnicities and religions. The Malaysian experience of preventing violence by balanced reporting instead of inciting articles and advocating Liberal Islam as a part of developmental journalism should be extended across border now. The Malaysian media has a responsibility to continue advocating Liberal Islam in the domestic scenario and the world arena alike. Only then will it be successful in its quest for ensuring that the definitions of peace, terrorism and humanity are universal in its true sense.

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