

Malaysia: Harapan's hijab mendacity

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"I am thankful to all the state assemblypersons who wore the headscarf in support of the solidarity campaign."

- Sungai Kandis assemblyperson Zawawi Ahmad Mughni

COMMENT | The quote above refers to an event where non-Muslim reps donned the headscarf in a show of [solidarity](#) with their Muslim counterparts after the New Zealand mosque massacre.

Sungai Kandis assemblyperson Zawawi Ahmad Mughni also said this about his "solidarity moment": "It is also an effort to show all Malaysians that we must be united in rejecting all forms of extremism and radicalism as these breed violence and destruction."

Think back before the historic election last year, where non-Muslim candidates were donning headscarves and mixing with Muslims in mosques in urban centres to demonstrate that non-Muslims and Muslims were working together to overthrow the regime of former prime minister Najib Abdul Razak.

At the time the *de facto* Islamic affairs minister was the darling of the opposition movement. A Muslim politician who was the go-to guy whenever an Islamic controversy cropped up that needed some Muslim cover.

Hannah Yeoh's biography causing a stir in the Malay far right? No problem. The affable Mujahid Yusof Rawa to the rescue to [pose with the book](#), and reassure Malays they would still be Muslims if they read the book.

"Anyone can write, based on any theme they choose. Yeoh brought the theme of God and talked about how God had helped her and so forth."

"People of all faiths can have a similar experience based on their different beliefs and interpretations of God."

Of course, all this is a far cry from what Mujahid has been propagating once he become the religious czar of the Pakatan Harapan regime.

Of Putrajaya's introduction of a syariah-compliant dress code, he said: "There are many cases of Muslim women being discriminated against."

"We hear comments from stewardesses and hoteliers who are not supposed to wear certain clothing that they wish, just because it is against the company's code of conduct."

"I am not taking sides, but as the government, I have to also hear out and be fair to people who are being [discriminated](#) against in such forms."

Isn't it strange? Mujahid goes on about protecting the rights of women being discriminated against

for wearing the hijab, but he has no problem backing initiatives which are discriminatory towards marginalised groups, in the name of protecting the sanctity of Islam.

He went after a woman's march because he claimed the LGBT movement ["hijacked"](#) the event, for instance.

Now, he is deeply disturbed by the 'Malay Women and De-Hijabbing' forum and the launch of a book by activist Maryam Lee.

Really? The go-to guy for Islamic moderation is worried about a forum where Muslim women discuss the dress code of their religion? What happened to all that compassion and understanding he and his non-Muslim supporters were propagating?

When Mujahid was pushing the syariah-compliant dress code he said, "We are not being controlling. If a woman refuses to follow the guideline, fine, it is their choice, but at least the guideline is in place," which basically means he understands that wearing a hijab is a choice.

Why then is he endorsing a state religious body for investigating a forum where women discuss their choice of not wearing the hijab?

Mujahid also said [this](#) about the dress code: "Maybe the word 'syariah-compliant' sent shivers down the spines of some people. but let's just say it is a dress code that is culturally and ethically right."

What nonsense is this? First, the minister says women have a choice, but then he babbles that syariah-compliant really means culturally and ethically right. So what does this say about Malay/Muslim women who choose not to wear hijab? Are these women not culturally or ethically right?

The always reliable Latheefa Koya, in defence of free speech and well, rational thought, said this: "There is [no compulsion](#) in religion. Where is this principle?

"Just because a person does not wear the veil, does that mean she will go to hell? Will she become an apostate? Will she become a promiscuous woman? Come on *lah*... this is an extremist view."

Is this the kind of "extremism" Zawawi was talking about when non-Muslim reps donned a headscarf in support of Muslims in this country? Where are all these non-Muslim reps now, when the Harapan state is going after women for discussing their choice of not wearing a hijab?

Where are these reps who had no problem 'hijab-ing' when it suited their political purposes, but remained quiet when the state attempts to clamp down on narratives of women who choose not to wear a hijab, much like the freedom non-Muslim women have when it comes to their religious beliefs?

Or do these non-Muslim politicians think that wearing a hijab is culturally and ethically right, too?

Aliran's response to this harassment highlights the discourse which is very important for this supposedly moderate Muslim country which Mujahid is the spokesperson for:

"It is a discussion which is important, as around the world we continue to see instances of the coercion of women in wearing the hijab (for example, in Iran), but also in taking it off (for example, in France). There is a need to discuss and analyse the roots of such coercion and insistence on controlling what women can or cannot wear."

Mujahid is gung-ho about protecting the rights of women who are discriminated against for wearing the hijab, but why isn't he similarly gung-ho about protecting the rights of women who choose not to wear the hijab?

Why is the Harapan state attempting to clamp down on this discourse, when before the election they were projecting themselves as the moderate alternative to the far right Najib regime?

Mujahid can read a book by Yeoh and not lose his religious beliefs, but he is worried that Muslims who read Lee's book will suddenly lose what is culturally and ethically right. Does this make sense to anyone?

The mendacity of the Harapan regime is contributing to the existential threat this country is facing, which is religious extremism.

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