

INTRODUCTION ON MALAY ISLAMIC MONARCHY (MIB) CONCEPT TOWARDS GOOD GOVERNANCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Good governance has been a prevalent issue in the public discourse of many governments and societies. It goes without saying that governments have a divine duty to protect the interests of their people. Therefore, good governance in the context of governments is an ideal that many strive to achieve that is also indicative of a public governing system that looks after the happiness and well-being of the public citizenry.

However, a holistic fulfillment of good governance remains an uphill challenge for many governments. Good governance is defined to have 8 distinctive characteristics, which are participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law (UNESCAP, 2009). All of these characteristics are difficult to achieve altogether due to, amongst other things, the uniqueness of each government's governance framework and, other socio-economic political factors.

Notwithstanding the degree of differences in the socio-economic political landscape and governance framework of each country, governments in common establish supreme audit institutions (SAIs) as one of the many means of ensuring good governance. SAIs have been mandated to carry out their fiduciary responsibilities which, *inter alia*, are aimed at protecting the public funds and citizenry's interests, ensuring transparency in public service delivery, improving the management and utilisation of public resources, and enhancing good governance and accountability in the public sector. Therefore, it can be tacitly agreed that SAIs play a pivotal role in ensuring that good governance is holistically adopted into part of the public working culture.

Enhancing good governance, however, does not solely lie on the institutional shoulders of SAIs. In all societies, moral and religious values play a key part in good governance (Noor, 2008). In Brunei Darussalam, there exists a unique national philosophy which has a major influence on molding good governance. It is a philosophy which is embedded into the public conscience to such an extent that the country's very foundations

are bounded by its overarching values. This philosophy is called *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) or Malay Islamic Monarchy.

As such, it is the aim of this paper to show how MIB has impacted on good governance in the Bruneian public sector. In that respect, this paper will first provide a retrospective on the MIB philosophy – although it must be stressed that this paper does not seek to elaborate on the conceptual framework of MIB in detail. Following that, it will provide an insight into how MIB acts as a constituent of civil good governance. The paper will then look into the Audit Department of Brunei Darussalam (“Audit Department” henceforth) as a case in point on how MIB has influenced its governance, and how from there the Audit Department can further enhance good governance in the public sector. Finally, the paper will conclude by summarising the key points on the discussed topic.

2. A RETROSPECTIVE ON THE MIB PHILOSOPHY

It has been argued (Talib, 2002) that MIB is not a new innovation for Brunei but rather it has dated back as early as the fourteenth century and has formed the basis of the Brunei Sultanate ever since. Only in July 1990, on the occasion of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam’s forty-fourth birthday was the concept of MIB proclaimed. Legal references to the concept first surfaced in the 1959 Constitution which spells out the Malay language as the official language [Cap 82(1)], Islam as the official religion [Cap 3(1)] and the Sultan as the head of state [Cap 4(1)]. There was no further mention of the concept until the Declaration of Independence in 1984 whereby, in his proclamation address, His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam declared Brunei Darussalam would from henceforth be known as *Negara Melayu Islam Beraja* (a Malay Islamic Monarchical State).

In that address, His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam specifically proclaimed Brunei Darussalam as a sovereign, independent and democratic Malay Islamic Monarchy which observes the teachings of Islam according to *Ahli Sunnah*

Wal-Jemaah of *Mazhab* Shafi'e. Here, the three distinct components of MIB are emphasised: Malay cultural values, Islam as a way of life, and the traditional political system of Malay monarchy. These three components, on the whole, encapsulate values important to Bruneians. In His royal address on his forty-fourth birthday, His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam stressed this point by stating that the Malay language unites the people together; Islam is a religion which respects the rights of the people; and lastly, the monarchical system is a system that has fused into part of the heritage of the Bruneians. The concept, it can be established, forms the fundamental basis for unifying the Bruneian citizenry and subsequently becomes part of the Bruneian identity. Furthermore, it has even extended to unifying the non-Bruneian populace as they have learnt to respect and appreciate its values.

As such, MIB has become a national philosophy that has very much been embedded into every vein of the country's governing system and culture, so much so that it has become a national ideology. It is seen as being important that citizens are educated on the concept's values. MIB is currently being propagated in schools and has been incorporated in the nation's educational curriculum for the past 20 years.

In the primary school level, MIB values are taught in the Civic subject with the aim of having students practise the commendable attitude and behaviour in accordance with the requirements of Brunei; be responsible for themselves, family, community and country in accordance with the teachings of Islam, and can adopt the lifestyle of Muslim Malays and be loyal to the monarch.

In the secondary school level, among other goals are to instil the values of commendable character, loyalty to the monarch and religion, respect the language, nation and country based on the MIB philosophy; to create unity and harmony; and to produce responsible, dedicated, competent and tolerant citizens (Piri, 2012). This is to ensure citizens continue to uphold MIB values with noble moral values, respect their neighbours and are always ready to help a friend in need wherever they are throughout the world.

MIB also encompasses the substance as well as the spirit of traditional Brunei (Talib, 2002). Since the mid-1960s, ceremonies, customs and traditions, which had been

largely forgotten, have gradually been revived. The revival of traditional arts and crafts has also been officially encouraged as evidently displayed in the establishment of the National Arts and Handicrafts Centre in the capital, for instance. In a way, MIB provides the citizenry with the means of appreciating and accepting their heritage which includes their customs, traditions and the monarchical system.

3. MIB'S INFLUENCE ON GOOD GOVERNANCE

MIB's influence on good governance is, to a great degree, underpinned by its values which encompass all facets of Bruneian life. But essentially, two key concepts can be drawn here with respect to MIB's influence on civil governance in Brunei: *amānah* (trust) and *ikhlas* (sincerity).

Amānah, which literally means trust in Arabic, defines man's rights and responsibilities in relation to all other humans and his environment and the rest of God's creation (Zein et al., 2012, p. 13). In other words, the fulfillment of *amānah* is a prerogative and responsibility of the collective human community, of which the individual is an active partner in the process. Hence, the concept of *amānah* is declared by the Qur'an as the cornerstone to the establishment of institutions to govern society under a just socio-political order thereby emphasising the need for an effective government (*Ibid.*, p. 16). However, *amānah* must be conducted with '*adālah* (justice) so as to preserve the common interest. A study by Zein et al. (2012, p. 18) best describes the importance of marrying *amānah* with '*adālah* in the interest of protecting the rights of stakeholders (common interest):

"From establishing the moral foundations of business ethics to governing a society, a country or one's own life to the utilization of resources—this overarching amāntization at all levels (micro, macro, international, global and beyond) covers all activities with a sense of social responsibility and commitment to social justice within the confines of public interest. Hence as far as the fundamentals of governance are

concerned, whether it is the individual's personal life, his/her business activities or the affairs of the state and politics, all of them revolve around the concept of amānah, and call for preserving the public interest, which is a measurable outcome of the moral foundations of governance at all levels."

Ultimately, the implementation of *amānah* with honesty and justice would yield a number of positive consequences related to good governance such as, among other things, the participation of the people in public affairs, general consensus on major issues, rule of law, transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency.

It can be established then that the concept of *amānah* is a crucial pre-requisite of good governance. In the context of the Bruneian public sector, *amānah* significantly lends itself to the ethical values of the civil service. The work of a civil servant in the public sector is seen as an *amānah* or a form of obligatory duty entrusted by Allah the Almighty. This, in turn, by itself breeds a sense of accountability in a civil servant's actions and decisions when one carries out his/her duties.

Extending this concept further, a civil servant's duty is also considered an *amānah* entrusted by the head of state i.e. His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam regardless of the degree of importance the role one plays in the civil service because everyone plays a crucial part in contributing to society. Talib (2002) argued that the Brunei Malay monarchical system binds the monarch and his subjects in a single identity and it has been firmly established and reinforced in the Bruneian society. Therefore, in a way, *amānah* can also be translated as obedience to the ruler of the country as a result of this bond or connection to the king of the Sultanate. In displaying this obedience, all citizens who report for duty in the civil service are required to make a pledge to signify their loyalty to the government i.e. the head of state.

The other key concept with regards to MIB's influence on Bruneian civil governance is *ikhlas*. The word is literally translated as sincerity, which refers to the sincerity of intention (Siddiqi, M.H., 2012). Borrowing from the concept of *amānah*, fulfilling an *amānah* is deemed a good deed and therefore must be accompanied with sincere intentions so as to be rewarded the grace of Allah the Almighty. In the context of the civil service, Bruneian civil servants generally are programmed in such a way that they carry out their duties with

the purest and most sincere of intentions thereby implying to offer the best in public service delivery.

Both concepts deal with the notion of integrity which is an important ingredient of good governance. On the importance of integrity, His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam (2010) highlighted:

“...Integrity should be the corner stone of public services. Without it, any country can collapse, or at best, lose its will (ability) to develop...”

One of the common consequences for the lack of integrity in the public sector is fraudulent activities. Therefore, a strong and robust governing system coupled with integrity ensures fraudulent activities can be mitigated.

Additionally, the Muslim Malay cultural values in Brunei are also a key essence of MIB's impact on good governance. Several studies (Jaafar et al., 2004; Aktan & Özler, 2008; Prinz, 2011; Weigand, 2012) argue that cultural values and norms do indeed affect moral judgment. Morality, in turn, influences good governance. Muslim Malay values found in MIB, *inter alia*, are deeply entrenched in decorum, respect, and the trait of helping one another, or repaying a good deed to maintain good relationships with people. These values crucially guide and govern civil servants to carry out their duties diligently and with integrity but most importantly, act in the best interest of all stakeholders.

All in all, the themes discussed here are made apparent in the “Moral Pillars and Work Ethics of the Public Service of Brunei Darussalam” (*Ciri-Ciri Rukun Akhlak dan Etika Kerja Perkhidmatan Awam*), which serve as a Code of Ethics that governs all civil servants. These values, which include being honest, trustworthy, efficient, accurate and caring, are considered the essential ingredients for the Civil Service of Brunei Darussalam towards creating an efficient, effective and trustworthy organisation (Brunei Times, 2012). The development of this Code of Ethics presents one of the government's proactive initiatives in promoting good governance and ensuring that it is entrenched in the working culture of the public sector.

4. BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MIB

The stewardship and governance of the Audit Department is quite deeply-rooted in the principles of MIB. The recently developed Strategic Plan for 2013-2018, to a large extent, displays essences of those principles. They are very prominent in the focus of the Strategic Plan which revolves around fostering excellence in three main pillars: (1) Excellence in Auditing, (2) Excellence in Our people (workforce of the Audit Department), and (3) Excellence in the Working Environment of the Audit Department.

In terms of the first pillar of the strategic framework, the Audit Department carries out its audits in line with the values of MIB as its fiduciary responsibilities are an *amānah*, which the Audit Department strives to fulfill effectively, fairly and act in the best interest of all stakeholders i.e. for the common good.

In terms of the second pillar, the Audit Department's workforce's core ethical values are closely based on the "Moral Pillars and Work Ethics of the Public Service of Brunei Darussalam" which as discussed earlier is based on MIB values, such as integrity, trust, accountability and a number of Malay cultural values – all of which are crucial in the department's service delivery and achievement of institutional goals.

In terms of the third pillar, the Audit Department aims to foster excellence in its working environment such that not only it is conducive for its workforce but it also respects the MIB values.

Through the Strategic Plan, MIB principles therefore have helped to equip the Audit Department with ethical values which would help to overcome the inherent challenges which are typical of SAls' environment. This is important for the Audit Department to fulfill its duties of carrying out its audits effectively, and ultimately act as a catalyst of good governance in the Bruneian public sector.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

MIB is a national philosophy unique to Brunei Darussalam. Its history dates back since the birth of the Brunei Sultanate in the fourteenth century. It has become part of the Bruneian heritage and has nonetheless endured the test of time despite existing in an era of democratic nation-states.

In Brunei Darussalam, MIB forms the backbone of shaping good governance in the Bruneian civil service. It is an ethical framework which is underpinned by its three distinct components – Malay cultural values, Islam as a way of life and the monarchical system as part of a proud Bruneian heritage. MIB consists of values which encompass themes such as trust, sincerity, justice, integrity, accountability, respect, unity, and helping one another – all of which are fundamentals in the promotion and enhancement of good governance.

Admittedly, like for many countries, the holistic fulfillment of good governance is a goal that is very challenging to achieve in its entirety. Although MIB has laid the foundations for good governance as an ethical framework, it alone cannot achieve good governance. Good governance still requires a catalyst to bring about its materialisation. In recognition of that, the Audit Department acknowledges that it has an important role to play in ensuring that good governance is pursued. To that end, the Audit Department is fully committed in its duties to promote good governance and enhance accountability in the public sector by aligning its strategic framework with the MIB philosophy.

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