

DEPARTMENT OF MALAY STUDIES (1967 - 2018)

Syed Hussein Alatas Inaugural Memorial Lecture

THE MALAYS IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS ASEAN:
PROTECTING IDENTITY; UPHOLDING INTEGRITY
DR CHANDRA MUZAFFAR

I ABSTRACT I Malays who are preponderantly Muslim constitute one of the most significant ethnic groups in ASEAN. Whether they are the majority or a minority in different ASEAN states they have been concerned about their identity in various ways. By identity one means not just the conventionally accepted identity markers such as language, cultural practice and religion but also the position of the community in politics, economics, in social life and in the history of the nation. Concern about identity has been shaped by a number of factors which are specific to a particular country but also by larger regional and global forces which have evolved over time. Thus, in the case of Malaysia perceptions of Malay identity have been determined by local demographics, economic realities associated with the Malay and non-Malay communities, institutions and the practice of politics and power and increasingly the relationship of different segments of the Malay populace to Islam. At the same time, there is no doubt at all that the multi-religious ethos of ASEAN is beginning to shape specific expressions of religious identity within the region. Beyond ASEAN, the interface between Muslim societies and Islam, on the one hand, and the rest of the world, on the other, has begun to affect politics and inter-religious ties within ASEAN states. It explains for instance why Islam in recent years has emerged as one of the most important determinants of identity even in Indonesia. The way Islamic identity is conceived has begun to impinge upon values and principles of governance such as integrity and honesty, accountability and transparency. There have been occasions in Indonesia and Malaysia where in the name of protecting Islamic identity, integrity as an attribute of governance and leadership has been set aside. What are the consequences of such an attitude for the practice of Islam itself? How will it impact upon the integrity and the dignity of the Malays as a people? How do we evolve a notion of identity which incorporates and integrates integrity and other such noble values? More than integrating integrity, can integrity or justice or compassion establish itself as the defining characteristic of a people's identity?



I ABOUT THE SPEAKER I Dr. Chandra Muzaffar is the President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), an international NGO based in Malaysia, which seeks to critique global injustice and to develop an alternative vision of a just and compassionate civilisation guided by universal spiritual and moral values. Chandra is also the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the 1Malaysia Foundation. He has published extensively on civilizational dialogue, international politics, religion, human rights and Malaysian society. The author and editor of 31 books in English and Malay, among his most recent are *A World in Crisis: Is There a Cure?* and *Critical Concerns from East to West*. Chandra was Professor and Director of the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya (1997-1999) and Professor of Global Studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia (2007-2012). Chandra is the recipient of a number of international awards related to his scholarship and social activism.