

[Islam Is on the Move in U.S. And Malaysia](#)

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Pathmarajah, Adiyar N. Islam is a religion on the move. That's how The Wall Street Journal described it in the first of a front-page series run in mid-August on the world's fastest growing religion. Although the articles focused on political and economic impacts, it also gave US businessmen a rare look into the complex, highly-charged faith that has governments, even Moslem governments, struggling for understanding. America's 1.8 million Moslems are less than 1% of the population, and thus little is ever published about them here. The latest news to surface in Newsweek was a shift among Black Muslims from firebrand evangelism to chic fashion brands - they are starting a nationwide cosmetics company, ala Avon, to raise funds and employ members. Elsewhere the Moslem community is quietly planning a massive seminary and missionary facility in the mountains near Sante Fe, New Mexico.

In the wake of recent riots and more than 400 deaths of Iranian fundamentalists at Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the WSJ focused on the religious ferment which is causing friction among the varied sects who do not agree about how to live and practice their faith in today's world. Tensions are especially high when discussing the fundamentalists' struggle in certain nations to introduce Sharia (Islamic law) into government - with its harsh (to Western minds) ways, such as stoning adulterers, removing the hands of thieves, outlawing bank interest and alcohol and requiring women to wear veils in public. Government and religion under Moslem rule are not separate, and all citizens in a nation which has Islam as its state religion are bound by civil law to abide by the Koran's strict moral code. This is raising serious constitutional questions in Malaysia, as we will soon see.

Half of Islam's one billion followers (1/5th of the human family) are located in 8 countries. In descending order these are:

Indonesia 140 million

Pakistan 92 million

Bangladesh 90 million

India 90 million

USSR 50 million

Egypt 43 million

Iran 42 million

Nigeria 40 million

The new wave of popularity in Islam is fueled by an Arabian middle class which is increasingly disillusioned with the West, especially with America which it blames for bringing about modern problems in the Islamic world. Even moderate nations are having to listen to more radical Moslem demands.

Constitutional Problems In Malaysia

Malaysia is such a moderate nation, with 49% (7.7 million) Moslems. This month the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism rejected categorically all attempts to impose Islamic laws on non-Muslims. This respected Council was responding to a June 17 article in the Malaysian Star, wherein Mr. Mahmood Zuhdi Hj. Abd. Majid, delegate at a seminar called "Towards Making Islamic Law a Reality in Malaysia," was quoted as saying, "It is now the responsibility of those who advocate Islam to find ways to resolve the political &

constitutional hurdles that stand in the way of Islamic laws."

Mr. Jodinger Singh, newly elected President of the Council, noted, "Since Malaysia is not an Islamic state, any attempt to align the Sharia and Civil laws in such a way that the Sharia replaces the Civil law to the detriment of non Muslims would be undemocratic and would be an infringement of our rights."

Rev. Dr. Paul Tan Chee Ing, Hon. Secretary of the Council, took sides with Mr. Ghaffar Baba, Deputy Prime Minister, who explained that in the process one should "take into account values of justice and fairness affecting the whole society." "Islam has always claimed justice for everyone. This is very noble. Let the adherents practice it," added Dr. Tan.

While the Malaysian Buddhist Association noted that misunderstandings of this magnitude "could bring about political instability," others stressed the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious society, with over half being non Moslem. "This should not be forgotten," said Dale Govinda Raj, President of the powerful Malaysian Hindu Sangam. "As such, we too have a right to say what is good for us. Any imposition of Islamic law is a breach of the human rights of non Moslems."

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