

PROTECTING MUSLIM MINORITIES IN SECULAR STATE: SINGAPORE'S POLICY PROHIBITED CONTROVERSIAL RELIGIOUS FIGURES

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Abstract

In the middle of 2022, there was a case of a religious figure who was banned from entering Singapore until a demonstration took place. In addition, various negative sentiments and unfounded hatred have emerged because they do not understand the applicable rules. This study seeks to examine and understand the Singapore government's policy of detaining several religious figures from entering Singapore. The method used in this research is qualitative with a research approach related to the implementation, performance, and impact of the Singapore government's policies. The results of the study indicate that the policy issued by the Singapore government is not to grant permission for several religious figures who are considered extremists to enter Singapore for several reasons, including to maintain Singapore's investment climate. This action is an effort to maintain security and minimize racist and discrimination issues so that investors do not leave Singapore, as well as so that there are no teachings that conflict with state principles or have the potential to damage the pluralistic structure of Singapore's society because it consists of various religions and ethnicities. The implication of this research shows that Singapore is a country that is friendly to all religions. However, there are several anticipatory policies to realize world peace.

Keywords: Muslim minority, security problem, Singapore, secular country, Muslim banned

Introduction

Every independent country has sovereignty, namely the right to manage all aspects of its government without interference or being disturbed by other countries without exception. This shows respect for the state's highest constitutional sovereignty in the territory it controls. This sovereign right also shows that every country has domestic and foreign political rights in the world political arena (Samekto, 2009).

Each country has its policy in managing the domestic political system, including allowing things that are considered following the country's goals or otherwise prohibiting things that disturb them. Malaysia, for example, until now, does not allow Israeli citizens to enter their territory, as well as Malaysian citizens are not allowed to

enter Israel's territory. This kind of policy is commonly applied by various countries worldwide, including Singapore, which has its domestic policy.

Singapore, as an independent country, has its policies, especially regarding the prohibition of people whom they think will disturb the order and security of the country. So that various regulations are made to maintain order and security of their country from various disturbances that may be caused (Abshire, 2011).

The incident of the prohibition of Ustadz Abdul Somad, known as UAS, and six members of his family from entering Singapore is one of the internal policies implemented by Singapore to maintain the security of its country. The incident on Monday, May 16, 2022, caused controversy in the community, especially in Indonesia. The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) on Tuesday, May 17, 2022, communicated with the Singapore Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) regarding the ban on Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS) from entering Singapore. Based on the communication, ICA said UAS did not meet the (non-eligible) criteria to obtain an entry permit under the immigration policy imposed by the Singapore government. "The refusal of entry is based on being ineligible for the issue of a pass under current immigration policies.

However, the Indonesian Embassy in Singapore did not receive an explanation from ICA or other relevant authorities as to why UAS and the entourage were not eligible. For this refusal, the Indonesian Embassy immediately sent a Diplomatic Note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore to obtain information on criteria such as what the immigration authorities meant. Indonesian Ambassador to Singapore Suryopratomo on Tuesday revealed that Singapore would not reveal why they were barred from entering UAS because it was the immigration authority of the Singapore government. So that other countries do not have the right to interfere in their domestic affairs.

The Ministry of Home Affairs in Singapore stated that Somad and his entourage of seven people arrived at Tanah Merah Port in Singapore on Monday, May 16, 2022. Somad was also interviewed before being refused entry to Singapore. Somad and his entourage were sent back to Batam on the same day (www.kompas.com).

Legal expert Yusril Ihza Mahendra also spoke about Ustadz Abdul Somad being refused entry to Singapore. For good Malay-Islamic relations in Southeast Asia, according to Yusril, Singapore must explain the actions against UAS. "The Singapore government must explain the prevention of UAS," said Yusril, quoted by news.detik.com. The former Minister of Law and Human Rights views UAS as an Islamic religious leader whom the Indonesian people respect. He called UAS a straight-line cleric who was not actively dealing with power and relations between countries. "In the context of the ASEAN Community, which has close relations between citizens, the rejection of the presence of UAS can raise a question mark in good relations between ethnic Malays and Muslims in Southeast Asia," said Yusril (www.detik.com).

Chairman of the Central Executive Board (PP) Muhammadiyah Anwar Abbas also asked the Singapore government to explain its rejection of Ustad Abdul Somad. Anwar Abbas does not want this case to damage the good relations between Indonesia and Singapore. "Muhammadiyah deeply regrets the actions of the Singapore government in banning Ustad Abdul Somad from entering the country," said Anwar Abbas in his statement. "For this reason, Muhammadiyah asks the Singaporean government to be able to explain as clearly as possible to the Indonesian people what has been the cause so that the Singaporean government has determined not to land or not to land to UAS and deported him," he said.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the PKS faction of the DPR, Jazuli Juwaini, asked the Singaporean Ambassador to explain the UAS being refused entry to Singapore.

According to him, there must be an apparent reason why UAS was deported. "Of course, there must be a clear reason someone is prohibited from entering or 'deported' from a country. Moreover, UAS is a respected scholar and intellectual in Indonesia," Jazuli said in a written statement. "Do not let there be unfounded reasons, likes and dislikes, and unclear presumptions or no evidence," he continued.

After receiving several pressures, the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs finally informed them that the reason for the ban was because some UAS lecture content spread extreme teachings and divisions. "Somad is known to spread extreme discourse and segregation unacceptable to the multi-racial and multi-religious society in Singapore," the Ministry of Home Affairs said. "For example, Somad's lectures about suicide bombings are legal in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and can be considered a martyr. He also comments that demeaning other religions, such as the Christian Cross being considered a home for the genie of infidels. Somad has also publicly called non-Muslims infidels," he continued.

In more detail, the ban on the entry of Ustadz Abdul Somad to Singapore can be seen from their official tenure, namely; First, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) ensured that Ustadz Abdul Somad Batubara (Somad) arrived at the Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal in Singapore on May 16, 2022, from Batam with six travel companions. Somad was interviewed, after which the group was denied entry to Singapore and placed on a ferry back to Batam the same day.

Second, Somad is known to spread extremist teachings and segregation, which is unacceptable in Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious society. For example, Somad has preached that suicide bombings are legal in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are considered a "martyrdom" operation. He also made derogatory comments about members of other religious communities, such as Christians, by describing the Christian cross as the abode of "pagan jinn." In addition, Somad openly refers to non-Muslims as "kafir".

Third, the entry of visitors to Singapore is not automatic or entitlement. Each case is judged on its own merits. Meanwhile, Somad tried to enter Singapore under the guise of a social visit. The Singapore government takes anyone who advocates violence seriously and supports extremist teachings and segregation. Somad and his travelling companions were denied entry to Singapore (www.mha.gov.sg).

Singapore's Minister of Home Affairs, K Shanmugam, did not want to apologize for the Singapore government's rejection of Ustadz Abdul Somad. In an interview transcript published on the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs website, K Shanmugam stated that his party would not tolerate hate speech and divisive ideologies. This approach, according to him, is applied to anyone indiscriminately. "We will not allow people like Somad to have the opportunity to rally local followers or engage in activities threatening our communal security and harmony," said K Shanmugam. The Singapore Minister of Home Affairs gave an example of how Abdul Somad promoted extremist and divisive teachings in general, such as calling the "infidel jinn" living in crosses and labelling non-Muslims as "kafir".

According to K Shanmugam, the rejection of Abdul Somad is the same as that experienced by two Christian preachers from abroad. In 2018, Singapore banned Christian preacher Lou Engle from the United States from lecturing in Singapore for fear of disturbing Singapore's state security. Likewise, they banned other religious leaders for the same reason, namely lest they get sympathy from Singaporeans so that it would disturb the country's security.

Officers from the Immigration Checkpoint (TPI) of the Batam Center International Port checked the arrival of seven Indonesian citizens who were refused entry to Singapore by the Singapore Immigration authorities on Monday, May 16, 2022. The

seven Indonesian citizens had the initials ASB, SN, Hn, FA, AMA, SQA, and SAM. One of the seven people is a preacher in Indonesia and his family who arrived at 18.10 WIB from Tanah Merah Port, Singapore, using the Majestic Pride Ship (www.immigration.go.id).

Previously, the religious leader and his family were known to depart by using the MV ship. Brilliance of Majestic at 12.50 WIB to Singapore from TPI Batam Center. Upon arrival in Singapore, the ICA (Singapore Immigration and Examination Authority) refused entry (denied entry) to the seven people because they did not meet the requirements to visit Singapore. The seven people immediately returned to Indonesia at the first opportunity and arrived back at TPI Batam Center at 18.10. The reasons and decisions for the refusal of the seven people are the full authority of the Singapore immigration authorities. "There is no problem in the passports of the seven of them; from the Indonesian Immigration, it is under the provisions. The reason why the Singapore immigration authorities refuse them is entirely the authority of Singapore, which we cannot intervene," explained the Sub-Coordinator of Public Relations of the Directorate General of Immigration, Achmad Noer Saleh.

This issue becomes interesting to discuss. As a sovereign country, Singapore has its own rules, especially in licensing people who are considered to disturb public peace and domestic security. However, this issue is related to religious leaders who have many followers in Indonesia, Malaysia, and several other Southeast Asian regions. Moreover, based on an official statement that Ustadz Abdul Somad was prohibited from entering because the contents of his lecture used many terms that are not allowed in Singapore.

Referring to this incident, this article will discuss Singapore's policy of prohibiting people they think will disturb the country's security regardless of religion, race, and ethnicity. Incidentally, the case in May 2022 was a prominent religious lecturer from Indonesia who was well known to foreign countries, especially Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and other regions. How exactly does Singapore protect the Muslim minority from various thoughts that can disturb the country's security?

State Sovereignty Theory

Sovereignty comes from the Latin word *superanus* (sovereignty in English), which means "the top." A state is said to be sovereign or sovereign because sovereignty makes the state have the highest power. Of course, this supreme sovereignty is limited by the sovereignty of other countries.

In terminology, sovereignty can be interpreted as a government with absolute power over affairs within a territory or territorial or geographical boundary. The Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) notes that the word "Sovereign" means power or government. While sovereignty is the highest power over the government of a country, region, or region where the international community has long recognized the country (www.kbbi.web.id)

The notion of sovereignty does not contradict the existence of an international community consisting of sovereign states (Santoso, 2018). The meaning of a country having its sovereignty include;

First, Freedom and Equality. The meaning of a state having sovereignty is that a sovereign state is an independent state, free from others, and has equal degrees. Thus, sovereignty, independence, and equality do not contradict each other.

Second, Restrictions on the Sovereignty of Other Countries. Independence and equality are manifestations of sovereignty in a country. This understanding does not conflict with the concept of the international community as regulated in international

law. Thus, the limitation of a country's sovereignty lies in another country's sovereignty.

Third, Subject to the Needs of International Society Association. Restrictions on state sovereignty lie in international law regulating the people's lives between countries or the international community. The submission of a sovereign state to the needs of the international community is an absolute requirement for the creation of an orderly society. International law also regulates relations between sovereign states. Based on this, the orderly life of an international community is only possible with the existence of international law.

Sovereignty, based on its nature, is divided into; First, inward sovereignty is the highest power in a country or region, and there is no interference from other countries in running its government. In this case, state law has full rights to carry out government functions. The function of the state in efforts to implement internal sovereignty, quoted from the opening of the amendments to the 1945 Constitution, is as follows:

Protect the entire Indonesian nation and the entire homeland of Indonesia.

Promote the general welfare.

Educate the life of the nation

In addition, Indonesia has the sovereignty to do everything needed to regulate itself, such as making, implementing, and implementing laws and imposing and collecting taxes (Purnama, 2007).

Second, outgoing sovereignty relates to acknowledging all countries that a country has the same power. Indonesia has a role in relations between other countries and has an equal position as an independent country based on international law. This sovereignty is quoted in the opening of the amendments to the 1945 Constitution as follows:

Participate in carrying out world order based on freedom, eternal peace, and social justice

Article 11 paragraph (1) reads: The President, with the approval of the DPR (House of Representatives), declares war, makes peace, and makes agreements with other countries.

Article 13 paragraph (1) reads: The President appoints ambassadors and consuls.

Sovereignty out of a country is to make war and peace, form agreements, or conduct trade with foreign countries. In addition, there is also the right to allow or prohibit specific individuals or institutions from entering their country with considerations of state security or other considerations that become standards for that country.

Prohibiting people considered to be disturbing the country's security is included in the domestic sovereignty exercised by every country, including Singapore, which prohibits some people from entering their country. This prohibition applies regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, and class, so many names are prohibited from entering Singapore. Most of them are figures and people who have followers and are feared to disturb state security (Sigit, 2018).

Singapore's sovereignty, obtained on August 9, 1965, necessitated various policies to maintain state security. Moreover, the long experience of this country, primarily related to the issue of terrorism and the threat of the countries around it, makes them have to be able to take care of themselves so that cooperation with countries with the same fate as Israel is carried out. The aim is to safeguard and protect the community from all security disturbances. In addition, there are many other Singaporean domestic policies that other countries cannot contest.

Singapore and Domestic Policy

The Republic of Singapore is a small country located at the tip of the Malay Peninsula, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam border it. The name "Singapura" comes from the words "Singa," which means "Lion," and "Pura," which means "City," so Singapore is the City of Lions. This term has been commonly used since the 14th century to refer to a small area at the peninsula's tip (Amin, 2018).

Singapore became independent in 1965 and became an island nation with the official name of the Republic of Singapore. At first, the area was only 660 km², but then the coastal reclamation was carried out so that it became 719.1 km². (www.data.gov.sg). The country consists of the main island of Singapore, and 63 offshore islands, such as Pulau Ubin, Pulau Sentosa, and others (www.singstat.gov.sg).

The total population of Singapore is 5.6 million, of which 3.9 million are Singaporean citizens, and about 525 thousand are permanent residents. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2016, vi). The Chinese are the majority with about 74.1 percent, then Malays at 13.4 percent, followed by India at around 9.2 percent, and the remaining 3.3 percent are other ethnic groups such as Javanese, Bugis, Serani, and so on. (www.singstat.gov.sg). Malay is the national language, while the official language is English which is also the administrative language and the first language in schools. Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil are the mother tongue or second languages used by each ethnic group in Singapore (Kuah, 2009).

Singapore has an advanced trade-oriented market economy system. Singapore's economy is one of the most open in the world, seventh lowest in corruption, most pro-business, with low taxes (14.2% of Gross Domestic Product), and has the world's third highest GDP per capita. State-owned enterprises play an essential role in the country's economy, owning several companies, such as Temasek Holdings, which holds majority stakes in some of the country's major companies such as Singapore Airlines, SingTel, ST Engineering, and MediaCorp.

Exports, particularly electronics, chemicals, and services, make Singapore a key regional hub for wealth management that provides a significant source of income for the economy, allowing the country to buy raw materials they do not have. In addition, water is also not available in large quantities in Singapore; therefore, water is also considered a particular resource in Singapore. Singapore has limited fertile land, so they depend on agrotechnology parks for agricultural production and consumption. Human resources are also an essential part of Singapore's economic health. Singapore's economy ranked 5th according to Scientific American Biotechnology in 2013 for the 2nd year.

Singapore relies on trade in intermediates to re-exports by buying raw goods and then processing them for re-export, for example, in the wafer fabrication industry and oil refining. Singapore also has strategic ports that make it more competitive than its neighbours. Singapore has the world's highest trade-to-GDP ratio, averaging around 400% during 2008–11. The port of Singapore is the second busiest port in the world by cargo volume. In addition, good port infrastructure and skilled workers resulted from the country's education system (Huiwen, 2007).

The Singapore government campaigns for income-saving and investment through policies such as the Central Provident Fund, which is used to fund health and the needs of the elderly. The saving rate has been among the highest in the world since the 1970s. These policies are carried out to ensure the community's welfare.

More specifically, economic activity is that Singapore pays excellent attention to business, so this sector is very concerned. Not only in terms of profit but also security in maintaining vital objects of economic and business activity. This then necessitated the making of various policies issued to maintain security stability so that investors and business people do not run away from Singapore (Nugraha, 2018).

Muslim Minority Care in Singapore

Muslims in Singapore in 2000 were 14.7 percent. In 2010 it increased to 14.9 percent. In detail, the percentage of religious adherents in Singapore can be seen in the following table:

No	Religion	Percentage	
		2000	2010
1	Christian	14,6	18,3
2	Buddha	42,5	33,3
3	Taoism	8,5	10,9
4	Islam	14,7	14,9
5	Hindu	4,0	5,1
6	No Religion	14,8	17,0
7	Etc	0,6	0,7

Source: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, 2010, Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1 Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language, and Religion, Singapore

Referring to this data, Muslims in Singapore are a minority, with around 14.9 percent. The majority are Buddhists, Christians, and Non-Religious. In addition, Taoism and Hinduism are also a minority in Singapore. What is interesting to study further is that the number of people without religion who are increasing yearly. It can be understood that Singapore is a secular country that separates religion from other affairs, especially politics and the state. (Amin, 2018, 72 and an-Naim, 2015).

In the 2020 census, the religion with the largest number of followers in Singapore is Buddhism, which is 31.10% of the total population of Singapore. Then Christianity 18.90%, Islam 15.60%, Taoism 8.80%, Hinduism 5.00%, other religions 0.80% and 20.00% do not follow any religion (www.singstat.gov.sg).

Even though Muslims in Singapore are a minority, they still try to maintain their identity as Muslims and as a Malay. Since the establishment of the state of Singapore, Muslims have tried to implement Islamic law that can be done, primarily related to Muslim family law, namely regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, zakat, waqf, and various other Islamic symbols. Indeed, Singaporean Muslims have implemented family law since before its independence, as evidenced by the various regulations established by the colonial nation to regulate Muslim family law in this region (Taufiqurohman, 2021).

After Singapore's independence, the existence of Muslims became more stable with the passing of various regulations and laws related to family law for Muslims in Singapore. It is unique when in a secular country Muslims have a Mufti and a sharia court, who take care of all the needs of Muslims in this country. The Mufti has a vital role for the Muslim minority in Singapore, as he is a central figure in various policies related to Islam and Muslims there. This includes setting religious standards and determining which ones to follow and which not to follow (Tokyan, 2017).

The many schools, opinions, and groups outside Singapore impact the diversity of Muslims in this country. Although various precautions have been taken, the fact is that various Islamic religious sects exist in Singapore, from the Tablighi Jamaat, Muhammadiyah, traditional Islam, and Shia to Ahmadiyah. It is just that related to *asatidzah* as a preacher, giving lectures, recitations, or *tabligh akbar*, then there must be *tauliyah* (official recognition) from the Mufti.

Based on this, efforts to prevent unwanted things, including acts of terrorism, are implemented. Singapore, as a country with many people and religions, must always

maintain this plurality to be cautious about this. Do not let there be an understanding that is not appropriate and even contradicts the policy of the Mufti, which is feared to disturb the peace of the state and disrupt state security.

Experience so far shows that Singapore must have a policy related to strengthening land, sea and air security, which was previously already strict. This policy is intended to regulate security strategy that can last a long time and is coherent with the existing strategy building. This strategy was later referred to as Singapore's National Security Strategy or Singapore's National Security Strategy. In general, it is said that the strategy aims to prevent threats to Singapore's national security, protect Singapore against the threat of terrorism, as well as a form of response to these threats and protection if, in the end, security disturbances still occur and also as a form of recovery from threats and attacks that occur. In addition, in a complex way, Singapore interprets that this strategy will not work without cooperation between the Government, Technocrats, Civil Society and the general public. In carrying out this strategy, an institution coordinates the work of its apparatus in the form of the National Security Coordination Secretariat (Nugraha, 2018).

Through Singapore's National Security Strategy, Singapore seeks to integrate security actors such as intelligence, police, and military to produce effective prevention and protection measures. This is also a form of Singapore's protection for its citizens so that the threat of terrorists causes no fear. Including prohibiting all feared people will cause security disturbances such as terrorism.

So when there is a religious figure or someone with many followers but an understanding that is not following Islam in the context of Singapore, it is forbidden to enter this country. The standards used are different from Muslims with the majority. For example, they are not allowed to refer to people outside of Islam as infidels, including the understanding that leads to extreme groups such as ISIS, Hezbollah, Jamaah Islamiyah, and others.

Conclusion

Referring to the discussion on Singapore's policy in protecting Muslims from various understandings that can disrupt religious peace and state security, one of the policies implemented is to prohibit the entry of any religious figures who, according to their standards, carry an understanding that is not in accordance with religious pluralism in Singapore. Of course, apart from that, there is a factor in maintaining their economy so that investors and economic actors can comfortably carry out their activities in this country. If the security is disturbed, it will be easy for investors and business people to leave Singapore, which is undoubtedly very dangerous for the country. This is what happened in the case of Ustadz Abdul Somad, who was banned from entering Singapore because the understanding he had according to the standards in Singapore was extremely understanding and which was against Singapore, which is a country of people and religion. Indeed, not only are Islamic figures prohibited from entering Singapore, but other religious figures are also prohibited if they are not under established domestic policies.

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