



Scheme of Governance in Political Thought of Muhammad Assad

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Abstract

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Islamic political thought is the outcome of human affairs originated by the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) to disseminate justice across the human globe. Islamic political thought has incorporated the necessary ingredients of politics, modified its laws according to circumstances and challenged inhuman actions and laws that were eating very vitals of human society. Scholars of different ages contributed to the development of political thought. Among these is, Muhammad Assad who developed his political thought while analyzing his scheme of establishing an Islamic State by providing an alternative through a modern Islamic state governed by Shari'ah. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze the basic principles necessary for the foundation of the Islamic State. Mohammad Assad urged for the establishment of a true Islamic state which is imperative to implement justice, and equality and to serve as a model Islamic state at large.

Introduction

The religious-political change in Arabia, with the dawn of Islam, gave rise to a new worldview completely based on universalization/internationalization in the form of the real welfare state set up by the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in the city of Medina which guaranteed and provided all basic facilities to all its citizens like; dignity, equality, equal rights, freedom of religion and mutual protection against external aggression. Such a form of

governance gave rise to justice and equality free from geographical and linguistic boundaries. Governance is a pattern of ruling over people and controlling them under the justified law so that no one can feel discriminated against. In the thought of Muhammad Assad, Islam is the complete code of conduct and a major source of governance and politics, Islam plays a vital role in the life of humans and garners his political, social and spiritual consciousness. Muhammad Assad saw the possibilities of realizing his long-standing dream and longing for the establishment of a true Islamic state in the shape of Pakistan, based on the demand and movement based on the ideology of Islamic nationalism¹. Meanwhile, he concluded that the establishment of an independent Islamic state is an absolute necessity for the protection and survival of the Muslims in this region and the revival of Islam so that their moral and spiritual revolution could be brought about.² His state of Pakistan which he observed is the futuristic modern Islamic State, is not based on socio-cultural or national barriers but on the principles of Shari'ah.³ In 1947 he championed the creation and establishment of a modern Islamic state titled Pakistan. From a religious point of view, he advocated for an Islamic state where all rules and regulations of Shari'ah would be implemented without any hesitation. He garnered the idea of such a state in his writings for the betterment of people. A scholar of Jewish origin who converted to Islam and migrated to Pakistan, Muhammad Assad (1900-1992) tried to give Pakistan a futuristic vision of political Islam and worked to sort out his political thought in the form of his work "*Principles of State and Government*". It deals with constitutional questions about the nature of the power of various organs Islamic state. The major challenge to the modern-day Islamic State is the relationship with non-Muslim states, issues of women empowerment and rights of non-Muslims in the Islamic State along with maintaining the relationship with the secular world.

Muhammad Assad's political thought is embodied in the political philosophy of Islam. According to him, Islam guides all aspects of life particularly in the form of *Hukm* and *hudud*

or in general authority. There are seven categories of verses in the Quran concerning the political ideology of Islam;

1. Concept of Kingdom
2. Concept of Government
3. The sections about Command
4. Concept of Guardianship
5. Obedience and faith in Rules and Divinity
6. Selection of Government
7. Sections of the Quran about Judgment.

According to Hamid Enayat, the political thought of Islam remained at the forefront of Intellectual life for many centuries. The political phenomenology of Islam is discussed for two major reasons. First is the ongoing debate on the freedom and independence of Muslim political thought from Western hegemony. But currently, it has not reached its stated goal and is struggling between the compatibility and incompatibility of Western secular democracy and Islamic polity. Muslim scholarship is not yet liberated from political colonization, which has a major impact on the lives of Muslims across the globe but Pakistan in particular.

Second, is the combination of Muslim political, social and economic strategies which are welded into the political philosophy of Islam?⁴

Political upheaval in the first half of the 20th century has demarcated lines of ideology in many countries. Among these Pakistan is not exceptional. The emergence of Pakistan in 1947 gave rise to the thought about the governing scheme of the newly-born state. Religious scholars pressed hard for all-out Islamization from education to politics and from social to economic lifestyle. Their point of view is, that socio-economic and political life is intertwined in the religion of Islam and the need of the hour is to design the character of the newly born state on the guidelines of Islam. Muslims led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah

impressed upon the nation building on the modern lines with Islam as a state religion but Muhammad Assad and others were of the thought to establish a full-fledged Islamic State. His articles about such a political scheme in 1948 were published in the form of *Islamic Constitution Making* which opened the door for Islamists for the cause, to fashion the Islamic Character of Pakistan.⁵ Later on in 1961, his conceived idea was published by the University of California Press entitled “*The Principles State and Government in Islam*”⁶

Muhammad Assad developed a constitution based on Islamic principles which served more at theoretical lines than practical. The sources of his theoretically outlined constitution are political rulings revealed in the Quran and elaborated and practised by Prophet Muhammad.⁷ At that time constitutional framework committee gave very little consideration to his thoughts in framing the Pakistan constitution. Genuinely his work has the potential to serve as a political track and beacon light for Islam’s representation in the political framework.

Muhammad Assad in his work, “This Law of Ours the Other Essays” mentions that “the history of mankind is marked by the growth and decay of civilizations. Sometimes they are restricted to a particular region and race like the civilizations of ancient Egypt and sometimes they are produced by the joint efforts of several races and spread over vast expanses of space just like the present day Western civilization”.⁸

Accordingly, he announced Islam as an exceptional civilization nearly overwhelming in its distinctiveness which crossed the threshold between existence and non-existence and developed on its own at precisely in debris available to which its existence may be attached came into existence from it.⁹ The basic purpose of an independent government is to ensure the happiness and well-being of the people. Islam directs its followers to work out a plan of welfare and sort out modalities that will ensure positivity and in-depth obedience to the divine law known historically as *Shari’ah*. Islam governs its followers on the right track and

provides them with all fundamental and structural functioning to achieve the divine purpose of life which has been called in the Quran by the Almighty Allah

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me.” (*Al-Dharyat*: 56)

According to Muhammad Assad;

“Any State inhabited predominantly by Muslims or even entirely by Muslims is not necessarily synonym with an Islamic State. But can become truly Islamic by the application of socio-political laws of Islam or by incorporating Islamic laws to the constitution of the states”¹⁰

Islam considers life as a wholesome ritual life and worldly affairs which are intertwined with basic roots of idealism and are the main characteristics of Muslim political history. The fundamental purpose of Islam is a naturally God-fearing lifestyle. So humans and Islam are consciously, active in the coordination of desires and behaviors purported under divine guidance. Muhammad Assad points out;

“Islam fulfils all spiritual, physical, individual, social, economic, and political needs by providing detailed guidelines derived from the Quran and Sunnah. It also provides full conscious freedom to humans and allows them to be grateful or heathen.”¹¹ *Fuqaha* derived laws from basic sources and helped people to overcome worries and misconceptions of life, But Muhammad Assad consider a larger part of the *Fiqh* rulings as an outcome of various deductive methods by applying reasoning and by relying on Qiyas. It is Scholars of *Fiqh* who endure vital significance by extracting laws from Quran and Sunnah to solve the problems of their timings but the nature of modern-day problems is different and needs to be solved according to the present circumstance. A fresh rethinking is needed about the application of medieval *Fiqhi* derivation and a complementary will help to overcome the contemporary challenges. According to Assad “present-day political, social and economic issues need to be

addressed according to present-day circumstances and rules need to be devised accordingly.

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In his scheme of governance, a divinely guided state is more important, in which all actions give rise to human relationships. According to him, its conscious cooperation leads to universal brotherhood with positive social action in which they are enjoining right actions and prohibiting wrong actions. Such behaviour develops through divine guidance and all humans are treated equally but God-fearing and pious are highly honoured.¹³

The predominant thought of Muhammad Assad is that “the organization of an Islamic state is an indispensable condition of Islamic life in the true sense of the word.”¹⁴ He rejected the modern secular nature of the states because of their unstable norms which never uphold the nature of goodness and badness but what suits and aggravates to the interest of the nation is good and bad. All contemporary Western philosophies whether capitalism, economic liberalism, communism, secular democracy, nationalism, democratic socialism, or pseudo-scientism led to chaos and disorder because of the lack of moral values and ethical guidelines. All such philosophies gave rise to personal greed, national interest and regional dominance instead of piety and human values.¹⁵ While pondering over his scheme of governance, revolves around an Islamic moral state, in which all humans have equal rights and where secularization is prohibited as the *modus operandi* of the state but at the same time considers *Shari’ah* as a true representative of the divine scheme of rule. He also outwardly excluded Socialism and secular democracy as anti-religion philosophies and could not provide any sort of guideline on how to preserve divine identity. His point of view is, that Islam does not represent a few cultural traits of Muslims but governs their complete lifestyle as it upholds Muslims' historical cause and psychological consciousness.¹⁶

In the modern political sense or worldview, the Islamic worldview is not based on regional, cultural or linguistic values but is based on the divine constitution embodied in Aqedah-ut Tauheed.¹⁷

He is of the view that in modern secular states, its norms were not developed to judge between what is right and what is wrong but national interests decide everything as foremost criteria for right and wrong. All West-oriented systems like politics, economic liberalism, communism, nationalism, socialism, socialism and democracy are not able to overcome moral chaos and ethical deprivation but lead further to ethical degradation resulting in fraud and corruption. According to him, systems lacking ethical norms lead to greed, lust and finally to the decline of the nations. He outwardly rejected the Western concept of nationalism by declaring it against the Islamic concept of life. He advocated the universal concept of Ummah as a sole liberator of Muslims.¹⁸

Instead of the Western philosophy of life, religion has the power to provide moral value and help to maintain peace and harmony. The core of the religious teachings according to Muhammad Assad depends on divine will, which restricts humans from an absolute authoritarian style to an accountable being, before an absolute power. Such a situation gives rise to moral and ethical life and overcomes human greed and lust for supremacy.¹⁹ But still, under Western propaganda, religion is reflected in a barbaric past with no taste of human absolute freedom, while secularism and scientism are considered saviours of humanity and a tool to judge human society. Such a machinated mindset gave birth to immoral and corrupt rulers and declared the world a place of entertainment. Affiliation with Islam is the only justification for our separate identity, we are not an ethnic unity. We are not even linguistically united, although 'Urdu' has developed considerably as the language of Indian Muslims. We are not like the British and the Chinese and cannot become a nation in that very sense. Our political ideal is completely different from the ideals of the Turks, Egyptians,

Afghans, Syrians and Iranians. Among all the Muslim nations, we, and only we, are the Muslims of India, while leaving the darkness of the past aside and looking for the concept of Ummah Wahida. To achieve this goal and the quest towards which they are striving are guided by the perfect human being, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) forever.²⁰

Meanwhile, the establishment of an independent and sovereign modern Islamic state 'Pakistan' is an absolute necessity for the protection and survival of Muslims in this region and the revival of Islam, so that a moral and spiritual revolution can be brought to the life of Muslims.²¹ Such a state would emerge as a torch bearer and source of unity across the Muslim world. While observing the Islamic scheme of the world, is bound to divine law implemented by Prophets in their course of history particularly, after the departure of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), Abu Bakr Siddiq along with prominent companions of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) preserved the ethical and pious lifestyle of the Muslim world and disseminated the same to other parts of the world to safeguard humans from greater loss. The same line was adopted during the rule and successorship of other Caliphs of the *Khulfah-i Rashidun* era. Muhammad Assad well-thought-out them as the true representatives of “forerunners and route discoverers and their unfinished work with the same creative spirit, needs to be circulated across the globe because Prophet Muhammad said about them as “My companions are a trust committed to my community”²²

He elucidated that the moral base of the state helps to understand the needs and necessities of other human fellows. These moral standards are provided by religion and the state established on such values provides all sorts of needs and fundamental necessities without any discrimination for the preservation of human progeny. Such a state makes full allowance for the biological and social needs of humans. Islam as a religion and a state has such potential to provide all necessary biological and spiritual needs and provide guidelines

to overcome greed and restrict one's animal instincts through spirituality laid down in the Quran and Sunnah to overcome all forms of rigidity.²³

Talal Assad while analyzing his father's concept of establishing an Islamic State where people must show complete subjugation and total Loyalty. According to him "total loyalty" to a sovereign state is modern;

"The political unity of all citizens and their unconditional loyalty to the state are principles of the nation-state invoked especially in response to national crises (war, economic disaster, etc.), but pre-modern forms of rule could not demand them and did not need them. In the pre-modern, it was the loyalty of nobles, generals, and governors that mattered, not that of ordinary subjects. ... The modern state is a structure distinct from rulers and ruled, and its constitutional duty is to maintain itself as a state by any means necessary; it does not have any space within its territory that is independent of its absolute authority. Debate in the public sphere may crucially influence the formation of authoritative norms, but it is the modern state, through its various agencies, that authorizes them. For this reason alone, nothing in the past (including the Islamic past) corresponds to it".²⁴

According to Muhammad Assad, countless Muslims desired to have a socio-political system based on Islamic Principles but at the same time educated secularist Muslims advocate, that religion must not interfere in the state's political affairs. They maintain that religion should be restricted to ritualistic parts and not interfere in the decision-making of the state or state affairs. They consider such a state as irrelevant and vague to modern-day life.²⁵ He revealed that Western countries have rejected their religion for their reasons and this is obvious from their moral, social and political chaos and degradation. Such a lifestyle has degraded humans to animalistic characters and they have no stable norm which justifies what is good and what is evil. The original sense of right and wrong has lost its value in Western society. They have adopted only one norm of National interest.

Muhammad Assad pointed out that, it was Muhammad Iqbal, who convinced me to stay in India to work out the design for the future Islamic State;

“To me as to Iqbal, this dream represented the way, indeed, the only way, to the revival of all the dormant hopes of Islam, the creation of a political entity of people bound together not by common descent but by their common adherence to an ideology.”²⁶

Muhammad Assad’s basic argument is embodied in the ideological nature of the *Shari’ah* in comparison to the Juristic interpretation of different schools of Islam.²⁷ He believes in a state structure which would be consonant and synchronized with the Islamic ideals. Its constitution would be framed under the Quranic principles and its structure should be inconsistent with the principles of the Quranic to develop a compact society free from evil dynamos. In the contemporary era, the establishment of an Islamic state is a very tough job because the nationalistic ideas based on regionalism, linguistic and racial grounds are rooted in mental setup. Among the Muslims, the Western-oriented intellectual class are anti-Islamic political setup by declaring it irrelevant and vague. However, Muhammad Assad strongly believes in the foundation of an ideological Islamic state. So Muslim community has to establish such an ideological state because, without its foundation, no Muslim can live a true Islamic life.²⁸ It is developed under the guidance of Quranic “*nass*” in a more positive way and explained through Sunnah which provides an unaltered interpretation. Moreover, it is projected and enhanced by personal and *ijtihadic* derivations, which provide temporary legislation in nature “subject to the authority of the irrevocable, unchangeable *Shari’ah*”.²⁹ Such a situation inculcates and allows little growth of institutionalization of Islamic polity. *Shari’ah* does not provide or recommend any particular and inflexible code of law to the Islamic State upon which it lays down its foundation, nor does *Shari’ah* uphold a comprehensive divinely revealed legitimate model.³⁰ According to Muhammad Assad, the moral foundation of the Islamic state is embedded in the Quranic command “*enjoining good and forbidding evil*”. He

rejects the concept, that sovereignty belongs to people and dissents from the thought that ultimate sovereignty belongs to the people, He is also of the view, that ultimate sovereignty belongs to Allah and rejects the view that the cohesive will of the general public can be associated with the people's consensus (Ijma). A complete submission to Islamic leadership (*Ameer*) as head of the state is obligatory. He also stressed the appointment of the "*Ameer*" who accordingly solved the problems of his fellow through the guidance of revelation and reason. But for appointment of Ameer, he must be a Muslim, pious in character along with having leadership qualities free from autocratic nature pronounced through Quranic text as decide their affairs on a consultative basis,"³¹ While emphasizing legislation, he declares that they do all political activities even legislation with mutual consultation to make the political process more democratic. According to his view, the opinions of all legislative members must be taken into consideration on equal footing and legislation must be delegated to assembly members chosen by people for better governance which directly depends on Islamic welfare laws.³² Such a political process helps to maintain a close relationship between legislative and executive bodies. He tried to overcome the Westernization of political affairs and bring it out of this thought and uphold that the condition of politics does not exist in the Islamic states. His scheme of political governance based on the relationship of the leader and his consultative members is considered closer to the American statutory and legal structure. Muhammad Assad emphasized that "the *Ameer* must possess executive powers within the fullest meaning of these words".³³

While quoting Muhammad Assad, Hashim Kamali is of the view that "The idea has prevailed among Muslims that there could be but one form of the Islamic state, namely the form manifested under the Rightly-guided Caliphs. This is a common error. The truth is that Islam does not require conformity to any particular form. There is not only one form of an Islamic state but many, and it is for the Muslims of every period to discover the form most

suitable for their needs.³⁴ *Shari'ah* does not bind Muslims to only traditional forms of political organization. According to him, the Caliphate and imamate had developed certain features generally declared as Islamic principles of government. Such forms of political developments are juristic dogmas and historic developments suited to their era having no obligatory implication upon all times to come.³⁵

The basic objective is to work to maintain equality and justice. In this way, neither the judiciary nor any scholar is above the *majlis Shura*. So, the principles of consultation are not to dominate but bind everyone to submit to the decision of *Shura* even though they have differences of opinion between them. This is the only method through which justified rules of Islam are set up and made operational.³⁶

Muhammad Assad's political forbearance revolves around the core issue of assistance rather than cabinet systems which hinder the progress of the state, instead, all its bureaucracy must get involved in consultation and act as administrative subordinates, instead of feeling full-fledged power holders to create a dichotomy. All consultative members must be well versed in the Islamic purpose and have grasped the concept of justice to function as an advisory council of the minister.³⁷

The basic criteria for Islamic government are based on guardianship which provides all basic facilities to citizens. Muhammad Assad equates the citizens of the state with family all affairs are maintained by the guardian more ethically and legitimately.³⁸ For this purpose, Muhammad Assad quotes Ahadith from Sahih al-Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Abu Daud, and Baihaqi.³⁹ While upholding negotiation with leadership and the consultative body, Muhammad Assad suggests the establishment of the highest court of law to sort out all constitutional matters.⁴⁰ Such a court must uphold powers, to reject any act of both the leader (*amir*) and consultative body (*majlis Shura*) going against the text (*nass*) of the *Shari'ah*. The comprehensive commands, blended in the form of Islamic legality (*Shari'ah*) are

implemented and enforced by the state in Islam. In this regard, Muhammad Assad upholds the thought that *Shari'ah* is based on the injunctions about prohibition and enjoinder commands extracted from primary sources of Islam (Quran and Sunnah).⁴¹

While discussing the relationship between the state (i.e., government) and its citizens, Muhammad Assad thinks that the Islamic State has the right to get hold of the resources of citizens even their lives about the general interests of the community along with the security of the state.⁴² In such a legitimate state, citizens have the right to criticize the state policies and can complain even protest against the wrong policies of the government, but cannot revolt against the state.⁴³

In Islam, the law is more important than a ruler. The sanctity of law supersedes all the other options and its legitimacy cannot be violated even if the head of the state (*Amir*) is not above the *Shari'ah*. If any sort of violation by *Amir* leads to his removal from office via a referendum held under the auspicious supremacy of the supreme tribunal. According to Muhammad Assad, *Shari'ah* provides an opportunity to derive the “right to freedom of expression” within limits. As he mentions;

*“It is an obligation upon the government to protect the citizens against their external and internal enemies and to guard their possessions, their privacy, and their dignity. The establishment of free, universal and compulsory education, and the provision of economic security, are functions required of an Islamic state”.*⁴⁴

The Muhammad Assad concept of state upholds God as the ultimate sovereign which gives humans dignity and a strong will of divine power and safeguards them from pride and prejudice. The Quranic concept of *Salat* is not ritualistic only but helps to understand the sovereignty of God to establish a socio-economic and political order,⁴⁵ because indeed, *Salat* keeps away from vulgarity and disbelief. Muslims are His vicegerents upon earth assigned the position of *Khalifah* to establish His sovereign laws. But history is littered with the

wreckage of states that invoked religious-political principles. According to Hamilton Gibbs whole book of Muhammad Assad is an attempt to relate Islam to modern politics. In this regard, his concept of theocracy is more divine than the Western concept of theocracy. Islamically it is a socio-political structure where law-making is based on divinity not on Church-hood.⁴⁶

Pondering over the political thought of Muhamad Assad, the central Islamized political ideology is, that there is no god but Allah⁴⁷. God is the supreme authority in legislation⁴⁸. Being the final Dominion and Last authority obeyed without any infidelity and was eventually vested, revered⁴⁹ and worshipped⁵⁰. All manmade laws must be subordinate to the Authority of God. He is free from any kind of partnership in His divine empire⁵¹, being supreme and all-powerful (*Malikul Mulk*)⁵²

It is important to note that governments' existence does not lie in their political nature but in the implementation of socio-economic order on ethical lines so that greed may not become dominant in human behaviour. Greed and lust lead to a colonial mindset and the role of government is to overcome colonial mentality and to work out for implementation of moral values and maintenance of the social fabric.⁵³ People are not judged by power in Islamic society by their obedience and piety towards divinity. The maintenance of social fabric on equity lines does not allow hatred and communalism to snatch peace and harmony in society. Muhammad Assad upholds his political view against the political thought of Ibn Taimiyyah. Muhammad Asad believes in complete under the codified system of Islam required to "enjoin the right and forbid the evil."⁵⁴ He believes in the universal cooperation and synchronization of political engagement of the Islamic state.⁵⁵ Delineating on the need of the Islamic state, he is of the view that the goal of Islam is the growth of a community on divine principles while an Islamic state is not "a goal or an end itself" but a source for

establishing or standing up for fairness and justice, in agreement with the natural Law of God, Islam.”⁵⁶

The right of legislation is an important aspect of Islamic governance. As such majority is not liable to the legislation because the power of legislation prevails by descending order from God to the Prophet and his successors known as *Ulul Amr or Khalifah* as per Qur’anic directions. The Quranic scheme of legislation goes directly against the modern democratic mode of legislation where the human being is the source of legislation. The government structure predicted in the Quran is neither purely democratic nor constitutional theocracy nor constitutional monarchy or theocracy in Western design but the true representative of a constitutional republic originated in Madina designed via Quranic laws. In Islamic political thought, there is no room for priesthood-based theocracy. For Islamic governance, rules are derived from *Shari’ah* to rule based on justice and equity.⁵⁷

Muhammad Assad espouses that such a state can become truly Islamic when its citizens particularly Muslims are aware of the value system of Islam. Such a system cannot work by imposition or implementation of Islamic rules only but by making people aware and conscious about the purpose of Islam’s socio-political doctrines to the nation’s life and by adopting them in the constitution of the country. Muhammad Assad Strongly believes in the foundation of an Islamic state, being an ideological community, committed to the application of divinity in their life. Moreover, without the foundation of such a state, no Muslim can live as a true representative of Islam and cannot adopt all Islamic ideals in their life.

Conclusion

Muhammad Assad’s political thought revolves around divinity and the utilisation of the Quran as a basic source of divine guidance. His scheme of governance considers the Quran as a complete guide but according to him, *Shari’ah* is carved by juristic elaborations. Muhammad Assad being a neo-convert and modernist in his thought adopted the approach of

Shari'ah state for Pakistan as other proponents of this thought believe. He upholds the thought; that Islam must serve as a source of law and guidance through a Sharia-oriented constitution to the modern Islamic state. According to him, Islam must serve as a vehicle to carry on the ethical and moral guidelines of Islam in the form of socio-political order. In this regard his calculation and research of Western societies and their failure on moral grounds is alarming but Muslim societies' imitation of the West is more distressing. He is also of the view that the Quran and Sunnah do not lay down any specific model of the state nor does *Shari'ah* carve any particular constitutional theory rather accept any kind of state model that fulfils the basic purpose of Islam.

In modern-day lifestyle, he calls for the fresh arrival of the Islamic state under the umbrella of the *ijtihadic* paradigm to fulfil the modern needs of Muslims. He chose to implement his political thought in Pakistan a newly emerged state for the Muslims with Islamic purpose but this model is not limited and relevant to a particular region or country but to any part of the world for the Islamic government. His Islamic political thought is global but it doesn't receive any green signal among the Muslim states to adopt this model.

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