Islamic Concept of Obedience to The Leader in Dealing with The Epidemic

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Abstract
The Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) is an epidemic that has dramatically moved health, politics, economics and health worldwide. This aftermath is still prevalent in Malaysia, especially in the post-pandemic phase of COVID-19. From a national standpoint, the leaders of each country are sedulous to deal with the issues and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this study aspired to discuss the concept of obedience to leaders in dealing with COVID-19. This analysis employed a descriptive qualitative method, which is a literature review. The conclusions confirmed that compliance with the leader's instructions during an epidemic is paramount to help the government contain the spread of the disease so that it does not spread and hurt religious affairs, lives and the economy. Besides, it is essential to remember that the leaders decided on specific measures following the advice of international and local health authorities, who are experts and authoritative about public health.
Keywords: Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19), Leadership, Public Health, Disease, Malaysia

Introduction
Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a novel disease discovered in 2019. As of 1 June 2020, the number of cases of COVID-19 worldwide reached 6,258861 million cases with 375,393 deaths. In Malaysia, there have been 8,884 cases and 123 deaths. This global pandemic influences health, economy, social life, and community psychology, such as panic, trauma, stress and depression. Furthermore, it involves matters related to management, new laws and

regulations that the people of a country must obey to contain the spread of this epidemic. For instance, Malaysia has declared a Movement Control Order (MCO) from 18 March 2020 to 9 June 2020. People must also acquiesce with recent procedures in movement, social and daily activities such as practising social distancing, prohibiting congregational prayers in mosques, closing schools and universities, promoting working from home, banning eating in restaurants, restricting visiting, limiting state cross, and concentrating on personal and environmental hygiene. The obligatory rules and procedures have, nevertheless, left a psychological influence and triggered people's annoyance because they cannot do their daily activities as usual (Norkhair et al., 2023). Furthermore, this has happened for the first time in Malaysia. Thus, at the initial stage, the people's obedience to these orders and regulations took time to materialise. Accordingly, this study intended to discuss the concept of obedience to leaders when dealing with an epidemic by taking the case of COVID-19 as an example.

Obedience to the leader is one of the critical obligations. It matters in Islam as long as it does not conflict with the Islamic Sharia. Allah SWT has given a mandate to humans as caliphs on earth to follow the orders of Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to carry out the command of enjoining good and forbidding wrong (Kashim et al., 2017). The Quran, surah Al-An'am, verse 165, remarks that the caliph is appointed on this earth to govern and flourish the earth. An unmoving leadership system in a country is vital to developing society for the well-being and prosperity of the people. The people are obliged to obey the appointed leader as long as the orders align with Sharia. It will result in the leadership of Muslims becoming more powerful, prosperous and peaceful. The position and rank assigned to the leader denote wisdom and foster public interest that must be realised. No unrest and calamities should occur and trigger the loss of goodness and fuel the destruction of religion and the world.

Islam naturally underscores the obligation to obey all the rulings written in the Quran and the Sunnah as commanded by Allah SWT. Power and following duties are rendered to leaders legally appointed to lead and govern the country with complete trust and justice (Kashim et al., 2018). As an ordinary human being, life will not be complete and well-managed without a robust and sovereign leader (Azhariah, 2010). Leaders' presence guarantees that the interests of the people and the country are secured. Consequently, Muslims are required to obey all the instructions of the leaders as long as they do not conflict with the will of Islamic Sharia. Unfortunately, some groups do not follow the leader's instructions precisely when an epidemic hit the country. When this happens and is not contained, the epidemic will spread, and precariousness will ensue in a country. If this transpires, it will destroy this earth, which will cause distinct problems caused by humans. Accordingly, the Quran and Sunnah have directed people to obey leaders' instructions, especially during epidemics that spread throughout the country and the world, such as the case of COVID-19. Therefore, this study endeavoured to discuss obedience to leaders in dealing with epidemics.

Position of Government in Islam
Islam is an exhaustive religion that discusses election, appointment and obedience to leaders. The obligation to obey the leader has been highlighted by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and is to be emulated by Muslims today. Every Muslim needs to adhere to Islamic teachings and not be divided with each other. It is one of the most substantial responsibilities to Muslims as commanded by Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

The government will achieve unity and maintain the integrity of the people through its leadership (Kashim et al. 2020a). Leadership positions are paramount in a country for legal stability and a government's harmony for people's well-being. Islam defines leaders as individuals responsible for the affairs of the people in general, such as caliphs, army chiefs, qadis, ministers and people responsible for overseeing a country, primarily an Islamic nation (Zulkipile, 1999). Leadership, according to the Islamic perspective, is about trust. It symbolises the trust to fulfil the responsibility to the people or his followers as best as possible, embodying the leader's responsibility as the servant of Allah SWT (Zulkipile, 1999). It includes taking care of the prosperity of the people from socioeconomic, education, and health aspects.

A ruler or leader is someone or a group of people who manage the interests of humankind and are representatives appointed to carry out the government's obligations. Several other designations, such as ulil amri, also relate to its definition. Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Redha (Abd Karim 1988) noted that ulil amri includes leaders, rulers, scholars, army generals, and all leaders and figures the public looks up to in their needs and interests.

Apart from carrying out the responsibility of maintaining the community's good fortune in economy, education, health, and national growth, leaders are also responsible for executing Islamic Sharia in the country (Kashim et al., 2020b). Most of the implementation of laws in Islamic Sharia is subject to the government's authority. One cannot implement these laws except through the authorisation and directions of the government, such as judging court cases, appointing guardians, proclaiming curfew orders, declaring war, and signing peace memorandum. Hence, to encourage the laws of Sharia to be fully implemented in the right way and accepted by Allah SWT, a government must enforce those laws and monitor their performance wisely.

In Islamic Sharia, there is a category of law called Imamah (government) or siyasah syar'iyyah (Islamic politics). These laws are flexible, and Sharia does not detail it. Rulings in this category are subjected to the opinion and ijtihad of the government based on the interests and circumstances of Muslims. If there is no capable and authoritative government to take on this position, all these laws will be pending. A ruler must be qualified and competent to instruct the people under his leadership (Ibn Taimiyah, 1998). Islam offers rulers a noble position, and obedience to them is one of the central ingredients Muslims must pay attention to (Muslim, 1991).

Obedience to the government is an obligation for the people as long as it does not conflict with Islamic law. In the context of ibadah (worship), one must always seek help from Allah SWT and adhere to the guidance of His Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. On the other hand, obedience to the government is not absolute because they are human with all kinds of shortcomings. If the order or instruction from the government is by the provisions of Allah and Prophet Muhammad PBUH, then one must follow it. Nonetheless, if the government's orders or directives are against the will of Islamic Sharia, then it is not obligatory to obey them; in fact, one must advise the leader (Ibn Taimiyah, 1998).

Anas bin Malik also states the obligation to obey the government in a hadith:

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH ordained me to be obedient even if the leader is a disabled (impaired) human being (Al-Bukhari, 1992).

However, ruling obedience to government is not absolute like obedience to Allah and Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Although the rulers must maintain several priorities, one must understand that they are bound to taklif (responsibility) and not tasyrif (glory) alone. Therefore, one must satisfy this responsibility with complete prudence and accountability (al-Bukhari, 1992). Hence, it verified that the government faces grave responsibilities, mainly when going through sins and rewards auditing on the Day of Judgment. It goes beyond getting particular honour and personal interests; it serves as a benchmark that will decide the position of its account holder, whether in heaven or hell.

The appointed government needs to carry out tasks based on the model introduced by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Al-Mawardi (1996) noted that among the characteristics of a good leader or ruler are those who possess the attributes of justice, implement shura, have acquainted and extensive experience in politics, maintain physical fitness such as a healthy body, perfect hearing and vision, have good manners, courageous and tenacious. A government governs and realises Islamic leadership principles as a government that conducts politics based on religion and the guidance of Allah SWT. Those who oppose this principle depend solely on reasoning and self-interest and are rulers who practice 'evil's politics' (Ibn Taimiyah, 1998). This is because political practices that do not comply with the principles of Islam will eventually be used as a tool by the devil to derail them from the true path (Ibn Taimiyah,1998).

Islamic Concept of Obedience to the Leader in Dealing with Epidemic

Obedience to leaders is a command from God as recorded in the Quran (al-Nisa' verse 59) and the Sunnah. Accordingly, Allah SWT commanded humanity to care for and administer this earth as best as possible based on His orders and prohibitions. It is essential to guarantee peace, harmony and stability in the lives of Muslims in a country. Therefore, an Islamic government will only be victorious if an obeyed leader addresses every state's affairs based on Islam (Mahmood, 1999).

In the context of obeying the leader who rules the country when an epidemic of infectious disease occurs, it becomes a duty for all Muslims, as stated in surah al-Nisa 59, to do so. Al-Tabari (2001) recorded that the verse repeats the call for 'obedience' to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, such as when there is a call to 'obey' God, but there is no call to 'obey' the government. Thus, this proves that obedience to those in power is not absolute, like to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Hence, when a leader directs people to do things against Allah SWT's orders, the people must oppose the instructions. Since absolute obedience is only owned by Sharia, Muslims must obey all the decisions and wisdom of the government in preserving the welfare of humanity as long as the decision is per the provisions of Islamic Sharia.

In the present position of the spread of disease outbreaks such as COVID-19, national leaders have issued instructions and guidelines that must be observed by the people so that the spread of the disease does not escalate to a more severe level. This commitment must be

shared so that a country can adequately handle the spread of the epidemic. It is necessary as the directive is for the good of the people of a nation (Sanusi, 2020). The Prophet Muhammad PBUH said, as narrated by Abu Hurairah RA:
You should listen and obey (the leader's orders) in challenging or comfortable situations, (and) in situations where you willingly accept the order, (or) in situations where you hate it, and in matters that go against your interests (Muslim, 1991).

Hence, it confirmed that the hadith calls for Muslims to obey the instructions of leaders who issue orders and instructions. For example, the Movement Control Order (MCO) throughout the country have been carried out to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic. Hence, to safeguard the public good for Malaysians, people must obey this order, and it is forbidden to violate it because it will lead to more substantial harm for all parties. Those who disregard it can be subjected to legal punishment with the penalty of takzir in addition to being subjected to fatwa as sinful for intentionally causing harm to themselves and others.

In addition, obedience to leaders in dealing with the issue of COVID-19 is the central pillar for the harmony and progress of a nation and religion. People must obey their leaders if the instructions are within the scope of public interest and safeguarding the Maqasid Shariah. Implementing that obedience needs to be emphasised by the leaders occasionally (Mazlan et al., 2017). To ensure that all instructions in safeguarding the Maqasid Shariah are preserved, the government or authoritative bodies must act decisively in dealing with the issues of epidemic transmission by looking at the enormous scope of problems for the local community while also taking into account external factors (Al- Sayuti, 2001; Hapiz, 2011). The purpose is clear: to preserve the Maqasid Shariah and mitigate any harm or threat to religion, soul, intellect, and wealth. Islam forbids actions that cause damage to oneself or others, and it applies to family, community or people in a country, regardless of religion and race. The fiqh method underlines La darar wala dirar, underscoring the need to eliminate all the harm the Sharia acknowledges.

Consequently, with the current epidemic, obedience to the government goes beyond nationalism. It is about obeying the orders of the Islamic religion in addition to helping the government to organise life, especially in dealing with the issue of infectious epidemics such as COVID-19. In Islam, obedience to the government stresses efforts to motivate blessings and refuse harm. Thus, it verified that Islam prioritises maslahah (beneficial) and rejects mudarrah (to harm) towards humans. This adherence and commitment will decide whether all planning, strategies, and actions to prevent the epidemic from continuing to spread will be successful.

The Importance of Obeying Leaders in an Epidemic Environment
A leader is a group that needs to be obeyed by the people he rules. With people's obedience, a leader can rule out or implement recovery and prevention planning effectively. When the country faces an epidemic, the people must obey all the government's instructions. All instructions will undoubtedly lead to benefits and reject all harm. The same thing was done by Umar bin al-Khattab when he was about to enter Syria, which was infected by the Amwas Plague epidemic (Ibn Kathir, 1999). Umar cancelled his trip to Syria to care for the greater good of Muslims (Ibn Kathir, 1999). Most companions confirmed the instructions Umar issued

(Ibn Kathir, 1999). Ultimately, Umar's act became an example and basis for today's people (Ibn Kathir, 1999).

In the face of the dangerous threats due to epidemics, Islam forbids people to harm themselves. Islam emphasises prevention and taking precautions first. Among the arguments that explain this is a hadith narrated by Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqash RA; he expressed that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said:
"If you hear that there is a plague in a land, do not enter it, and if it breaks out in a land you are in, do not leave it" (Bukhari, 1992).

This hadith also clearly demonstrates the preventive measures to take during an epidemic. Through such a situation, the community must attend to and obey the leaders who issue the MCO orders during COVID-19 or other disease outbreaks to ensure the well-being of the people and the stability of peace and prosperity in a country.

Conclusion

Therefore, in the demanding atmosphere of encountering the COVID-19 epidemic, obedience to the leaders in dealing with this epidemic is a command from Allah SWT that every Malaysian must obey. Obedience to the leader is the primary basis in the country's administration to ensure the harmony of society. This concept is essential in Muslim life so that every Muslim does not neglect and violate orders issued by leaders, especially throughout an epidemic such as COVID-19. Adherence to the leader's instructions during an infectious epidemic is fundamental to helping the government contain the spread of the disease so that it does not spread and impair religious affairs, lives and the economy. Ergo, Muslims should apply the concept of obedience based on Islam in dealing with the epidemic with knowledge and wisdom for the benefit of all parties. Furthermore, obeying the orders of the government and the governance during the spread of the epidemic is beneficial, and it intends solely to protect human interests. It is the responsibility of the people to carry out all relevant orders so that contagion does not harm human life. Even though the order seems to embroil people's lives externally, the government's contemplation is for the greater good of public life and health. Further, the government's decision is for everyone's benefit, and it has been made based on the advice of international and local health authorities who are specialists and authoritative on public health.

Acknowledgement

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