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## Recent Trends in Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia

خلاصة: لقد أظهر الاسلام بماليزيا فى عقد التسعينيات تطورا جديدا يتمثل فى تغيير أسس النشاط للجمعيات الاسلامية إلى أن تكون أكثر تسامحا وتعاوننا مع السياسات التى تحتطها الحكومة. ويظهر هذا جليا فى النشاط الذى تقوم به الجمعيتان الاسلاميتان الكبيرتان حاليا، وهما حركة شباب الاسلام الماليزية ((Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)) التى أنشئت سنة ١٩٧١م ومجلس التمثيل الاسلامي (Islamic Representative Council (IRC)) التى أنشأها الطلاب الماليزيون الدارسون فى بريطانيا سنة ١٩٧٤م، وقد تحولت هذه الأخيرة إلى جماعة الاصلاح الماليزية (Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)). وخلافا لما كان عليه حالهما فى العقدين الماضيين حيث كان التطرف واتخاذ الموقف المضاد سمتين لهما فقد أصبح كل من حركة شباب الاسلام وجماعة الاصلاح الآن رفيقة الحكومة تؤيدها فيما اتخذت من سياسات. وحدثت نفس الظاهرة عند حزب المعارضة وهو حزب الاسلام الماليزي ((Partai Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)) إذ لم يعد النقد الذى وجهه للحكومة بالشدة التى كانت معهودا منه فيما مضى.

وفى هذا الصدد هناك على الأقل أربعة عوامل أدت إلى تغيير موقف الحركات الاسلامية بماليزيا: أولها الموقف السياسي للحكومة تجاه الاسلام،

ففى هذا العقد من التسعينيات يطبق رئيس الوزراء، محاضر محمد (Mahathir Mohammad) سياسة الأسلمة فى مختلف مجالات الحياة: التربية والشئون الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، وأفسح المجال للجمعيات الإسلامية التى كانت معروفة بتطرفها ومعارضتها للحكومة من قبل إلى المشاركة الفعالة فى تحقيق السياسات التى اتخذتها الحكومة بشأنها.

وقد شهدت هذه الجهود دفعة قوية عندما انضم انور ابراهيم (Anwar Ibrahim) رئيس حركة شباب الإسلام الأسبق إلى UMNO وهو الحزب الإسلامي الحاكم برئاسة محاضر محمد. ولم يكن هذا التطور إيداناً بدخول الإسلام إلى دائرة السلطة فحسب إنما أيضاً كان عاملاً قوياً أدى إلى اتخاذ الحركات الإسلامية موقفاً لينا تجاه الحكومة، ومنذ ذلك الحين توجهت حركة شباب الإسلام بنشاطها إلى الاهتمام بالقضايا التى يعانى منه المجتمع. فقد وقفت الحركة إلى جانب الحكومة فى إنجاز البرامج التنموية للمجتمع.

ولقد سار هذا الوضع إلى مزيد من التحسن بانضمام جماعة الإصلاح، فخلافاً لما عليه موقفها المتطرف عندما كانت جمعية التمثيل الإسلامي صارت بكونها جماعة الإصلاح أكثر ميلاً إلى الاهتمام بالاستقرار، فترى أن تقدم الإسلام مرهون بقدره المسلمين على استغلال عظمة ماليزيا التى تصير بها قوة سياسية تنتصر للإسلام. وهكذا فليس من الضروري أن تصير الدولة إسلامية. وفى رأي حركة الإصلاح أنه ضالماً تكون رئاسة ماليزيا فى يد مسلم فإن القيم الإسلامية تترسخ تلقائياً فى

الحياة الاجتماعية، ومن هنا فإن الاتجاه إلى إقامة دولة اسلامية لم يعد فيما يبدو مناسباً.

وعلى عكس جماعة الاصلاح يتمسك حزب الاسلام الماليزي بضرورة إقامة دولة اسلامية لأن المجتمع الاسلامي التي يتم في نظره تطبيق الشريعة الاسلامية من خلاله لا يمكن أن يتم إلا إذا صارت ماليزيا دولة اسلامية. على أن هذا الاتجاه كان يعبر عنه في العقود الماضية بموقف المعارضة ولكن في الآونة الأخيرة اختار الحزب طريق التسامح والتعاون. وقد حدث ذلك ابتداء من سنة ١٩٩٣م عندما وقعت رئاسة الحزب تحت أيدي الفقهاء بدلا من القوميين الاسلاميين المتطرفين. وقد ازداد ظهورا ريثما قام الحزب بوضع برامج تحسين الأوضاع الاقتصادية للمجتمع حيث كان عليه أن يبنى علاقة طيبة مع أصحاب القوى الاقتصادية والسياسية بماليزيا.

هذه التطورات كلها إن دلت على شيء فإنما تدل على أن الاسلام قد أظهر اتجاهها جديدا في الآونة الأخيرة كان أكثر تفتحا وتعاوناً مع الحكومة، وكان حزب الاسلام الماليزي أكثر الأحزاب الاسلامية الثلاثة فعالية فيما يبدو على الوقوف بجانب المعارضة في المستقبل، وقد تمتع في الآونة الأخيرة بتأييد جمهوري واسع، وخاصة من أتباع دار الأرقم (Darul Arqam) وهي المؤسسة التي حلتها الحكومة العام الماضي.

ومع ذلك فإن هذا الاتجاه يتوقف على الموقف السياسي للحكومة، فقضية الفصل التي تعرض لها أنور ابراهيم والتي انتهت إلى وضعه في السجن قد أفسدت هذه العلاقة التناغمية بين الاسلام والسلطة.

## Introduction

In recent years, Islamic revivalism in Malaysia has displayed a new trend. Initially in the 1970s and 1980s, it emerged as a radical movement, employing a vocal, critical and confrontational approach. But in the last 15 years, at least before former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was sacked from the government on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1998,<sup>1</sup> it has mellowed into a more tolerant and compromising movement. This change has been especially apparent in two previously radical and vocal Islamic groups: the Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM), and the Islamic Representative Council (IRC). Throwing their radical image aside, both ABIM and IRC—now registered as *Pertubuhan Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)*—have adopted a relatively non-confrontational stance, and have become much more aligned with the mainstream Islamic interpretation that is dominated by the government, if not being totally absorbed into its position. A major political opposition group, the Pan-Islamic Party (PAS), is also known to have toned down its radicalism, especially since it has come under the *ulama*<sup>2</sup> (Islamic scholars) leadership in 1983.

If there are still Islamic elements voicing a confrontational tone, they can no longer be found within Malaysian Islamic groups *per se*, but more frequently come from the ranks of freelance Muslim missionaries, widely known as *pendakwah bebas*.<sup>3</sup> These figures are critical of the establishment, and so they must operate on an individual basis within Malaysia's strictly controlled religious environment, yet they have proven capable of disseminating their messages beyond the confines of established Malaysian Islamic movements. Their voices are not only broadly echoed by those within the formal Islamic movements, they, more importantly, have successfully penetrated grassroots organizations, shaping quite effectively the opinion of the masses. This reorientation of critical influence must be recognized as a recent phenomenon, which, to some extent, not only seems to be supported quite strongly by PAS, but may also help to restimulate the party's radicalism when political conditions are fitting for such activity to surface.

Since Anwar's incarceration, however, it may be that such a situation has arisen since the elements of radicalism appear to have regained momentum quite drastically. Since many Malaysians view the sacking of Anwar as unfair and his subsequent treatment as unjust, Islamic movements such as PAS, ABIM and JIM, have worked together with political opposition parties and NGOs to launch severe

criticisms and stage actions against the establishment. However, as it is a broad-based multiracial and multi-religious struggle that strives for a universal value, namely justice, its "Islamicity" is quite vague. Consideration of whether this emerging movement can be viewed as a new form of Islamic revivalism is intriguing indeed, such that a detailed analysis of this possibility has been treated in a separate paper.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of the present analysis is on the trends of Islamic revivalism before the sacking of Anwar, though where necessary, the Anwar issue has been mentioned briefly for reference. Specifically, this paper attempts, firstly, to understand the trend of Islamic revivalism before the Anwar Ibrahim episode; secondly, to analyze the factors and reasons that culminated in the changing of approach from confrontational to non-confrontational; and thirdly, to seek answers to several vital questions relating to the form of Islamic revivalism in the country that has been molded by this developing trend. Since these findings are based on on-going research,<sup>5</sup> the arguments embodied in this paper should be considered rather preliminary.

### The State of Recent Trends

As global Islamic revivalism swept the world in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there emerged at least five main Islamic movements in Malaysia. They are Jamaat Tabligh, PAS, Darul Arqam, ABIM and JIM. Jamaat Tabligh and PAS were actually established in 1952 and 1955 respectively, but their activities were seen to be rejuvenating and intensifying during this resurgence. The other three emerged later, Darul Arqam in 1968, ABIM in 1971, and JIM in 1991, that is during the time of the global Islamic revivalism itself. Though JIM seems to be a latecomer, its roots could be traced back to the establishment of the Islamic Representative Council (IRC) in the United Kingdom in 1974. Then very critical of the Malaysian secular government, IRC was established by Malaysian Malay-Muslim students studying abroad. After returning home, IRC members led the establishment of JIM with the support of and inclusion of other former overseas students especially those who had studied previously in Egypt and the United States of America.<sup>6</sup>

Of the five movements, only PAS, ABIM and JIM are registered with the Malaysian Registrar of Societies. PAS is registered as a political party, ABIM as a youth movement, and JIM as an Islamic NGO. Darul Arqam and Jamaat Tabligh, on the other hand, operate as un-

registered *dakwah* movements. The former considers itself a study group at mosques and *suraus* while the later is an informal missionary group without a clear organizational structure. Both by virtue of their unofficial status exclude themselves from activities that would allude to an organizational structure and necessitate registration with the Malaysian Registrar of Societies.

All the five in one way or another were accused of being extremists, especially during the earlier part of the Islamic revivalism. However, it is the three registered groups—that is ABIM, IRC (now JIM) and PAS— that seem to be related more with radicalism. By radicalism we mean anti-establishment, critical of the government and confrontational, but not to the extent of militancy and violence. Seen from this perspective, the aim of all the five Islamic movements could basically be considered radical indeed. Their aim, to alter public lifestyles and change the prevailing secular establishment into an Islamic system, clearly fulfills the characteristics of the radicalism we define above. But, in this present article, it is the methods of achieving this aim and their accomplishments that become the measurement of their radicalism.

ABIM and IRC were considered radical because they were unequivocally vocal and critical of the government, adopting a confrontational approach and becoming dynamic Islamic pressure groups that were anti-establishment. PAS, moreover, was radical because it was not only vocal and critical of the government, but also, as a political party, adopted campaigning methods that were sometimes considered as offensive by the government. But Jemaat Tabligh and Darul Arqam did not fall into the radical category as they were seen as apolitical and interested only in improving their inner-selves. Ironically, however, it was Darul Arqam, the movement regarded as apolitical that was the only Islamic movement in Malaysia so far to have been outlawed by the government. The reason for the banning was said to have related basically to its spiritual practice, but many observers argued that the banning was actually a political decision.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the other movements which were inclined more toward Islamic rhetoric and indulged in radical methods of accomplishing their aim, Darul Arqam practically changed the worldview and lifestyle of its members and established Islamic systems in almost all aspects of life, at least within the domain of its movement.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, though its method of achieving its aim was non-confrontational for it avoided vociferousness, Darul Arqam could be viewed as the most radical



of all from the perspective of its accomplishments, hence the banning.

While Darul Arqam was forced to its demise and Jamaat Tabligh continues to remain as an apolitical movement, the three supposedly radical movements—PAS, ABIM and JIM—have also become less aggressive since about the mid-eighties. In fact it is observed that both ABIM and JIM are co-opting themselves, or perhaps being co-opted and absorbed, into Malaysian mainstream Islam. Unlike before, they are more tolerant, accommodative and even compromising, with lesser dissenting voices. Even PAS, though still struggling from outside the mainstream and continuing to be critical of the government, also appears to be calming its radicalism. Dissatisfaction against the authorities on issues like blasphemy, visits of the Israel cricket team and Israeli students to Malaysia, the corporatization of institutions of higher learning, and the nepotism and cronyism among the ruling elites has been launched in more professional and mature ways. Their previous *modus operandi*, which involved, among other things, blunt allegations against members of the ruling United Malay National Organization (UMNO) party on issues such as infidelity, is now seldom observed.

Irrespective of whether the mellowing of radicalism among the three movements indicates their maturity or otherwise, it is certain that Islamic revivalism has now taken a different shape in Malaysia. It is marked by less conflict, more harmony, and systematic implementation of activity culminating in what appears to be a stronger and more peaceful Islam defined, of course, by the state. This does not mean that the Malaysian government is free of criticism relating to Islam, however this criticism is less frequently heard from Islamic movements like ABIM and JIM. The dissenting voices now seem to come from a handful of emerging freelance missionaries who, without associating themselves with any specific movement, actively disseminate their teachings and unfavorable analyses of the government's treatment of Islam among the Malaysian public at the grassroots level.<sup>9</sup> This development may have served as a seed for the most recent round of radicalism.

### Reasons for Accommodation

The trend toward accommodation in Islamic revivalism in Malaysia can be said to have been attributable to at least four factors. Firstly, to the favorable response of the Malaysian government. Second-

ly, to the entrance of the former ABIM leader Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO, hence the Malaysian ruling establishment. Thirdly, to the establishment of JIM and its *homeostatis* approach. And fourthly, to the changing of PAS leadership from Islamic-nationalist to *ulama*.

In regards to the first factor, the radical endeavors of Islamic movements were observed to have decreased, and the overall struggle for Islam was relaxed when the government changed its response from an initially unfavorable to a favorable attitude. The government, under the leadership of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, announced its commitment to Islam and subsequently formulated various Islamic policies in fields such as education, economy and administration. In this process, termed as Islamization, Islamic movements were directly or indirectly encouraged to participate, but of course within a framework and an Islamic interpretation designed and defined by the government.

Such endeavors appear to have been intensified with the joining of ABIM's President Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO in 1982. Consequently, the Malaysian people witnessed the emergence of an Islamic banking and financial system, an Islamic university and colleges, an Islamic administration system, and other significant projects. A portion of what the Islamic movements had initially strove for and envisaged had been realized through the cooperation of the government. Naturally this lightened the burden shouldered by the movements and drew their members into greater agreement with political leaders. It is partly for these reasons that movements like ABIM and JIM relaxed their critical sensibilities and changed their strategy to operate from within the mainstream.

It can not be ruled out that, in this process, Anwar's co-optation into UMNO has played a significant role in calming radicalism among the Islamic movements, in particular ABIM. This mellowing is interpreted by some observers as a decline in ABIM's visibility (Lee 1986), a decline in ABIM's strength (von der Mehden 1986), and a weakening of the movement as a result of members' migration to either UMNO or PAS (Muzaffar 1987). However, there are also observers who note the positive side of the development. Mehmet (1990), for example, insists that even with Anwar's co-optation, ABIM's dynamism continued to flourish especially among university students. Muhammad Kamal Hassan (1984) also sees the development as a genuine and maturing process, reflected by ABIM's characteristics which are realistic, practical, and oriented toward problem solving, and its

ability to present a concrete formula and program based on Malaysian realities.

ABIM, understandably, strongly agrees with Mehmet and Muhammad Kamal Hassan. It adds that Anwar's co-optation reflects at least two realities: firstly, that ABIM is an organization which is independent of the personal strength of a particular leader, hence the absence of a 'personality cult' syndrome; and secondly, as a result of the loss of members to UMNO and PAS, all but its most loyal members are naturally filtered out, thus, in the end, the movement is strengthened and long-held idealism is able to be translated into practice (Mohd Anuar Tahir 1993:4-5). As contained in the Keynote Address of the then ABIM President Siddiq Fadir (Anwar's successor) at ABIM's 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in 1983, ABIM looked forward to putting aside its normal rhetoric and concentrating more on realizing goals by putting them into practice (*lisanu 'l-hal*) (Siddiq Fadir 1989:45-66). ABIM's approach claims to take into consideration the contemporary atmosphere and societal needs, and to adjust to the ability and compatibility of the local socio-culture (ibid:19). And, according to ABIM's president, it is time for ABIM to leave the stage of "*umumiyyat*" and the philosophical framework and to move ahead towards concrete details and practical implementation (Siddiq Fadir 1989:56).

In consequence, ABIM, among other things, has been seen to have shifted its focus and emphasis from local issues to international issues, and decreased the frequency of critical and vocal statements. For instance, of 56 press statements made by ABIM between 1992 and 1993 (as published in Mohd Anuar Tahir 1983:35-149), 35 were related to international issues while only 21 to local issues. Of the 21 local issues, only one could be considered directly critical of the government, namely the introduction of sex education in Malaysian schools. The remainder either agreed with the government, such as with the abolition of the Ruler's immunity, or reacted negatively to a particular group, such as to the Association of the Malaysian Ulama' in regards to its Conference on Sunni and Shia'h, and to the Bar Council on its "un-Islamic" dinner occasion. It has also focused its attention more upon social ills such as white-collar crime, the selling of illegitimate infants, and the changing of religion among the Malay Muslims in London.

The increased concentration on international issues, especially in the 1980's and 1990's, has been acknowledged as a self-conscious de-

cision by ABIM itself (Mohd Anuar Tahir 1983:22). Likewise, the mellowing of its rhetoric has been attributed to the prevalent conviction among ABIM members that vociferousness is not actually a reflection of strength (ibid 1983:6). One question that has emerged from this type of organizational self-introspection is: Did ABIM actually support the government of which Anwar became a part?

The present and fourth President of ABIM, Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman answered the question unequivocally in 1997, fifteen years after Anwar's co-optation into UMNO. To him, Anwar's co-optation was a matter of strategy, and it represented the de-radicalization of ABIM. Though there were still radical voices in ABIM, especially among junior members who favored the vocal and critical approach of earlier years, the current president asserted that ABIM should remain as it had become. He felt that strong support should be extended to Anwar, and hence to the government. Although, with the sacking of Anwar from the government, opinions have doubtlessly changed, the president's previous position was based on Anwar's success in rising to the position of the Deputy Prime Minister. For the ABIM President, Anwar was to be supported in his attempt to rise to the number one position in Malaysia's government so that he could have the opportunity to realize his Islamic idealism. If he acted in a manner counter to ABIM's goals after he achieved full power, then, says the President, ABIM would have had to reconsider its strategy and approach.<sup>10</sup>

If it can be concluded that ABIM's reduction of a confrontational approach is due to Anwar's co-optation and its belief that Anwar's struggle for Islam from within the government must be supported, JIM's acquiescence can be attributed to a very different reason. For JIM, in the task of uplifting Islam in Malaysia, it is important to concentrate on what is available to Muslims in the country. One valuable asset is Malay supremacy (*ketuanan Melayu*), reflected, among many things, in the Malay's political and administrative power. Since the vast majority of Malays are Muslims, JIM asserts, this power must not be disturbed but instead maintained and strengthened, especially by increasing the Islamic commitment among the Malay-Muslim leaders. JIM's members believe that this could become the basis of, and an important means for, the full implementation of Islamic law in the country.

The process of Islamization, whereby a society's values are transformed and its social norms are realigned toward an Islamic orienta-

tion, has been taking place in Malaysia since at least the early 1970s. This process has been observed to have taken place in a harmonious manner, without major disturbances in the stability of the *status quo* (Saari Sungib 1995). Such a process is termed by JIM as *homeostasis*, a term that has been utilized by the French scientist Claude Bernard to mean, in the social reformation domain, a transformation process that does not change the fundamental strength in the system (Saari Sungib 1997:28).<sup>11</sup> To many, social transformation entails struggling from within against an existing socio-economic and political framework. But JIM insists that by adopting the *homeostasis* approach, they were able to stimulate change from within the Malaysian mainstream by basing their actions on Islamic ideals such as *islah* (reformation) and *tadrij* (stages).

For JIM, *islah* means launching reformation programs at all levels, be it at the national, institutional, or infrastructural levels. It involves a process of continuing education aimed at raising the consciousness of Malaysian citizens and influencing their principles and values relating to Islamic practices and activities in order to fulfil the objective of social reformation. *Tadrij* in the Malaysian case means endeavoring to change legal statutes, such as the Malaysian Acts and the Federal Constitution, and supporting the enforcement of civil laws, in the hopes of achieving an absolute form of justice. It is believed that this effort will naturally and eventually move the nation towards the implementation of the law of *shari'ah* (Saari Sungib 1995). JIM firmly believes that through such an approach, Malaysia will inevitably become an Islamic state in 2010 at the latest, that is ten years earlier than the government's target to become a fully developed, industrial nation as envisaged in President Mahathir's Vision 2020.<sup>12</sup>

For the above reasons, JIM is not actively pursuing the transformation of Malaysia into an Islamic state.<sup>13</sup> To JIM, as long as the country is being ruled and administered by the Malay supremacy that respects Islam, the question of establishing an Islamic state is no longer important. It is by 'respecting Islam' rather, that reformation and improvement towards 'upholding Islam' will occur. JIM's non-confrontational approach thus reflects their position, that if the ethnic Malays already have strong influence in leadership and governance in the Malaysian state, it is better not to disturb or challenge that existing reality (Saari Sungib 1996:45).

JIM's current stance obviously differs from its previous positions, particularly those expressed during the IRC era and the earlier overseas students days. It also definitely differs from PAS, which strongly

believes that an all-embracing Islamic system is possible only when an Islamic state is established. From the outset of its establishment, PAS has strongly held the belief that the realization of a comprehensive Islamic way of life could not be attained unless one has the political power, hence the establishment of an Islamic state. The PAS Constitution, particularly in Section 5, states such a belief, and particularly the very first of its two objectives mentioned relates clearly. It says that the objective of the PAS struggle is to strive for "a society and government in which Islamic values and precepts are implemented towards the attainment of the pleasure of Allah" (Pejabat Agung PAS Pusat 1990:2).

This objective was clarified in a more direct form in a separate writing by the PAS Information Department that has been quoted below:

"What needs to be understood is that the aim of the PAS struggle through political party is to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia...The PAS struggle for power to govern is not merely for power itself, but as a means to establish an Islamic state which is able to realize the laws of Allah completely. The purification of Islam and the sacredness of the *shari'ah* of Allah could not be maintained unless under the umbrella of an Islamic government adhering to al-Qur'an, al-Sunnah and other *shari'ah* sources as well as with the leadership attitude which really conforms to the *shari'ah* of Allah" (Jabatan Penerangan PAS Pusat n.d.:2).

Elsewhere within the same document, these arguments were further strengthened:

"Implementing the laws of Allâh in the form of *'ibâdah* (worship) such as fasting, praying, paying zakat, performing pilgrimage and so on is relatively easy but to implement other laws of Allah such as law, economic, political and social systems and so on is not easy, unless by establishing an Islamic 'government'. Based on this fact, it is a reality that power is the main condition in implementing the laws of Allah. For this reason, the struggle for governing power, to PAS, is a must for every Muslim. And it is this governing power that is called the political power. It is such a political power that has been the struggle of PAS for so long. The political power is a means of implementing the laws of Allah. The laws of Islam could not be implemented automatically unless through a governing institution. Only the government that strives for the laws of Islam that could guarantee an implementation of the laws of Allah. It is based on this fact that PAS has chosen the struggle through political party which is based on Islam as policy towards an Islamic rule. Therefore, what is strove for by PAS must be supported by the society, especially by the Muslims in this country" (Jabatan Penerangan PAS Pusat n.d.:6-7).

The above quotations clearly show that the main prerequisite of an Islamic state for PAS is political power. Indeed, according to one PAS

leader, attaining Islamic governing power is a collective obligation (*fard kifâyah*), similar to the case of *jihâd* (struggling for the Islamic cause) (Harun bin Taib 1981:23). According to a PAS sympathizer, establishing an Islamic state also implies an individual obligation (*fard 'ain*) (Wan Abdul Rahman Wan Abdul Latif 1991:19). While political power is a means to the establishment of an Islamic state, the Islamic state itself is viewed as a means to the implementation of a complete Islamic way of life. Without political power, not only is the establishment of an Islamic state considered impossible by members of PAS, but the execution of the laws of Allah that binds the complete Islamic way of life are also thought to be unachievable. In other words, for PAS, the complete Islamic way of life, through the execution of the laws of Allah, is believed to be attainable only through the initiation of an Islamic government established by the taking over of political power. It is believed that although political power undoubtedly must initially involve a mobilization of the masses from below, an Islamic state must be established from above.

As PAS links the implementation of a complete Islamic way of life with the comprehensive execution of the laws of Allah, the establishment of an Islamic state, therefore, does not only mean a change of political power and leadership, but also subsequently the replacement of the state's Constitution. To PAS this is inevitable because it is not the state that gives birth to Islam but instead Islam that gives birth to a state. In other words, according to one PAS leader, an Islamic state is born by laws outlined by al-Qur'ân and as-Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), and not otherwise (Harun bin Taib 1981:9). This explains why PAS has been so insistent in persuading the Barisan Nasional Federal Government to amend the Federal Constitution according to Islamic tenets so that Malaysia would eventually emerge as an Islamic state. It is moreover self-explanatory that in the state of Kelantan, the PAS-led government is very serious in attempting to change the Constitution of the state from conventional to *hudûd* laws. It could be easily implied that Kelantan believes itself to be unable to be a complete Islamic state unless the Constitution is changed.<sup>14</sup>

In brief, PAS views an Islamic state as a geographical entity, with power and Islamic socio-economic and political systems prevailing within it. It believes that it must be achieved through an electoral process necessitating a change of political power and leadership, from what they regard as un-Islamic secular power and leadership to Islamic power and leadership. Naturally such a belief would involve a confronta-

tional approach and a direct political threat to the Malaysian government. Previously, the confrontation between PAS and the government, especially with UMNO members at the grassroots level, was intense. For example, PAS went to the extent of accusing UMNO members as infidels while the government went even further by attacking and killing PAS members in Memali, Kedah.

But of late, especially since the beginning of the *ulama* leadership in 1983—that is a year after Anwar's co-optation into UMNO—such confrontation has taken a relatively low-level approach even though PAS continues to be critical of the government. The *ulama* leadership refers to a leadership which identifies itself as *pewaris al-anbiya'* (literally, inheritors of Prophets). Among its characteristics are respectable features exhibited by previous pious Muslims such as high commitment to the Islamic cause, sincerity (*ikhlas*) and piety (*taqwa*) in leadership, steadfast practice of Islamic lifestyles and modes of thinking, and having an image of self-sacrifice (Wan Abdul Rahman Wan Abdul Latif 1991:35).

The emergence of such a leadership is attributed to the urge for a more Islamic leadership and a more Islamic method of struggle. Such an urge originated particularly from the PAS Youth of Bukit Mertajam in Penang during the *Muktamar* (General Meeting) after having traced the un-Islamic nature of the then prevailing Malay-Islamic nationalist leadership of the party. The *ulama* leadership era came into actualization on 1 May 1983 through the leadership of Haji Yusuf Rawa and the establishment of *Majlis Syura Ulama* (*ulama* Consultative Council), after PAS President Datuk Asri and his 13 supporters, alleged as Malay-Islamic nationalists, became outcasts. Haji Yusuf Rawa then was closely aided by Islamic scholars such as the present PAS President Fadhil Nor, the present Deputy President Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, and the present PAS *Murshidul-Am-cum*-Chief Minister of Kelantan, Haji Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

The new *ulama* leadership has brought at least six changes to PAS members' attitudes, political vision and approach (Mohd Sayuti Omar 1991:53-58). Firstly, there was a drive for self-assessment and correction among individual members and within the Party itself. Secondly, priority and special concentration was given to both increasing the understanding of Islamic knowledge and the implementation of the laws of Allah in their daily lives. Thirdly, PAS members' mode of thinking was gradually changed from being obsessed with secularism (*ilmâniy*) and materialism to the concentration on the rights of human



beings as the Vicegerent and creation of Allah. Fourthly, Islamic scholars (*ulama*) have no more been merely a symbol in the Party but instead the main mover in the Party's struggle. Fifthly, PAS' image as merely a 'welfare political organizations' has been changed to a commercial one with its own cooperative and businesses in order to raise the living standards of its members and strengthen the Party's funds and finances. And sixthly, the new PAS leadership has been more rational and has opened its scope of struggle to a wider audience. For instance, it cooperated with the Chinese Consultative Council (CCC) and established an understanding with non-Islamic opposition parties such as Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia (People's Socialist Party Malaysia, PSRM), Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) and Parti Nasionalis Malaysia (Nationalist Party Malaysia, NASMA) under the banner of Harakah Keadilan Rakyat (the People's Justice Movement, HAK). It also extended its domain to secular-educated Malay Muslim elites, beyond its normal domain of the traditional Islamic-educated rural Malays.

It is with such changes that PAS has transformed the whole spectrum of its approach, from merely confrontational to a more mature and relatively harmonious approach. This is supported by a more knowledgeable and open-minded attitude of many of the party leadership and members. Under such a leadership and approach, the state of Kelantan has fallen back completely into PAS' hand for the second time in 1990, providing another opportunity to endeavor for the establishment of an Islamic state.<sup>15</sup> In 1998, PAS scored another unexpected success by winning a Parliamentary seat in a by-election in Arau, Perlis, previously an UMNO stronghold.<sup>16</sup>

According to PAS' Central Office, in between August 1997 to August 1998, nearly 4,000 people, including UMNO members, have joined PAS monthly especially in the states of Kelantan, Kedah, Pahang, Perak and Selangor.<sup>17</sup> These figures have increased drastically since the emergence of the Anwar issue in September of 1998. According to PAS Vice President Ustaz Haji Hassan Shukri, during 14 October and 12 December 1998 alone, a total of 33,518 individuals have joined the party.<sup>18</sup> As said by one new PAS member, the motivation expert Dato' Dr Hassan Ali, the party is being increasingly supported and joined by intellectuals and professionals.<sup>19</sup>

Despite attracting supporters through a relatively gentler approach, PAS still does not tolerate issues thought to be unjust and undermining or against the true teachings of Islam. In such cases, PAS would

take the opportunity to defend them, as in the case of the *mufti* of the state of Selangor, Datuk Ishak Baharom, who is also an outspoken freelance missionary. The former *mufti* was asked to resign by the authorities because of his alleged strictness in implementing Islamic law in the state.<sup>20</sup> Also, in the case of the assistant *imam* of the Selangor mosque, Ustaz Kamal Ashaari, who as well is a freelance missionary. The Imam was fired because of his criticisms of the religious authority JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia) relating to issues of blasphemy,<sup>21</sup> to the coming of Israeli students and cricket team to Malaysia, to the corporatisation of higher learning institutions, and to nepotism and cronyism among the ruling elites.

The *mufti* and *imam*, like a handful of other outspoken freelance missionaries, have become good friends of PAS and have been given full opportunity to express their teachings and ideas at PAS' public lectures and other programs. In this context, PAS' radicalism is seen to be gradually returning and the vocal freelance missionaries could be said to have contributed to some extent to restimulating such a character. Interestingly, the freelance missionaries who operate at the grassroots level have attracted a substantial number of people from the Malaysian masses. Many of the issues raised by them are gaining at least sympathy, if not a full level of support from many. Understandably, these sympathies and support too are flowing into formal PAS thinking.<sup>22</sup>

### **The New Manifestation of Islamic Revivalism**

The above factors have led to a type of Islamic revivalism that has tended to operate from within the mainstream, and through a non-confrontational approach as in the case of ABIM and JIM. In the case of PAS, though operating from outside the mainstream, there has also been a relatively more moderate and less confrontational position in recent years. Whether this reflects the maturity of Malaysian Islamic revivalism or the Islamic movements' obsession with the mainstream's baits of popularity, wealth accumulation, and other opportunities is intriguing. Yet certainly these are the factors that give shape to the new trend of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia—a more harmonized and homogenous movement which has allowed the definition of Islam to be dominantly formulated by the ruling power. In other words, as opposed to the earlier resurgence which was more of a confrontational nature that operated from beyond the structural framework of the ruling power, the current dominant resurgence of Islam in Malaysia operates from within—in particular from within the nation's Vision

2020. Even PAS in general and PAS in Kelantan in particular, despite being relatively more critical of the government and of un-Islamic issues than ABIM and JIM, could not help but be engulfed in the Vision's framework. Up till now, the PAS-led Kelantan government, being just a state government within a larger national framework, has had to bow to the national Vision, at least in its development planning.

However, of the three movements, PAS could be said to be the least in dispensing with the critical view of the government. It indeed may have a potential of being an efficient critic in the future. But how far could PAS mold the future trends of Islamic revivalism in the country? At the moment undoubtedly PAS has all the potentials: the gentler approach adopted by the *ulama* leadership and the support of the masses motivated by at least two factors, namely the vocal freelance missionaries and the banning of Darul Arqam.

In regards to the first factor, PAS has gained much from the government's treatment of Islam that has given rise to vocal freelance missionaries, culminating in the association of these missionaries with PAS, be it directly or indirectly. Of late, the government, and in particular the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself has been making unfavorable statements and comments on trivial but very sensitive issues such as the covering of female *awrah* and the keeping of male's beard (Ahmad Lutfi Othman 1998b). On larger issues, the Prime Minister has also attacked individual *ulamas* such as the former Selangor Mufti Datuk Ishak Baharom<sup>23</sup> and Datuk Professor Harun Din,<sup>24</sup> as well as portraying a favorable stance towards Israel, plus a defensive stance on the issues of nepotism and cronyism among the ruling elites. The longer such an attitude exists, the stronger PAS may become. The freelance missionaries may gradually mold public opinion, which has been becoming increasingly unfavorable of the government, let alone the injustice done against Anwar Ibrahim in recent months. In such a situation, Islamic-minded masses may eventually go for PAS as an alternative. The recent capture of the Arau Parliamentary seat is an obvious portrayal of this scenario.

PAS potential may as well have been strongly supported by a second factor, namely the demise of Darul Arqam. In Malaysia, it is a public knowledge that only Darul Arqam and PAS were considered as public-oriented movements that were able to penetrate the masses,<sup>25</sup> while ABIM and JIM are viewed as elite-oriented movements. As Darul Arqam was forced to disappear from public life, the masses have had few other alternatives, and PAS may well have been placed unwitting-

ly in a strategic position. Being a political party that needs as many votes as possible, certainly this development was welcomed by PAS on a purely pragmatic level. Nevertheless, if PAS is unable to capitalize on this opportunity and mobilize the masses in upcoming elections, then another Islamic leader may emerge, although probably not from within the ranks of either ABIM nor from JIM. With the groundswell of public dissent that has been exhibited in the wake of Anwar's trial, it is highly possible that a new opposition figure could emerge from Anwar's camp. Anwar's own wife, Wan Azizah Ismail, and colleagues who have recently launched the National Justice Party as a locus of opposition may prove important political players in the near future.

### Conclusion

In the past, the government's handling of Islamic revivalism, especially by acting to appease the demands of Islamic pressure groups, had led to the de-radicalization of Islamic movements like ABIM and JIM. But the government's offensive comments on and reactions to several important Islamic issues, even before Anwar Ibrahim's arrest, created dissatisfaction among Muslims and sowed the seed for a new trend of a critical-confrontational pattern of Islamic revivalism. However, before the sacking of Anwar, the trend of confrontation did not arise from the Islamic movements, most of which have been absorbed into the mainstream, but rather from the freelance missionaries. Being oppositional in nature, these freelance missionaries are naturally sympathetic toward PAS, the sole Islamic opposition party and the single Islamic movement in the country that seems to survive independently outside the government.

In general, Islamic revivalism in Malaysia, at least before the Anwar's episode, undoubtedly seemed to be relatively harmonious, and the freelance missionaries seemed to be working only on individual basis. However, unfavorable public opinion, aggravated by the government's offensive comments and statements on issues related to Islam, has been growing. If the government does not alter its attitude, it is not unthinkable that there would be another Arau by-election incident, which could spread throughout the country, giving more political power to PAS to formulate and execute a new trend of Islam. The raucous opposition to the treatment of Anwar is a clear indication that such a scenario may unfold and a political shift may be witnessed in the near future.

## End Notes

1. After months of political turmoil at the highest level of government, Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was accused of sexual misconduct and corruption and sacked from his position in the government and the ruling political party, UMNO. Upon his subsequent voicing of fierce opposition to President Mahathir and his government, he was jailed under the Internal Security Act (ISA), and later tried for charges relating to the alleged corruption and sexual misconduct. At the time of this revision, legal appeals were being lodged after he was sentenced to six years in prison. The Anwar episode has triggered anti-government street demonstrations and the emergence of new reformation movements and political parties, some of which involve, to some extent, a new mold of Islamic revivalism.
2. See page 18 for a discussion of the term *ulamak*.
3. Examples of such freelance missionaries are the former Mufti of Selangor Dato' Ishak Baharom; the former assistant imam of Selangor mosque in Shah Alam Ustaz Kamal Ashaari; the former Professor of Islamic Studies Dato' Dr Harun Din; and the former panel member of the previously popular government-controlled TV1 program *Forum Perdana* Dato' Ismail Kamus.
4. See Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 1999.
5. This research project is entitled *The Management of Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia*, and is sponsored by Universiti Sains Malaysia through its IRPA Short-Term Research Grant, 1998-1999.
6. Interview with Saari Sungib, the JIM Founder-President at his house in 1997.
7. For a discussion on this theme see, Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1995, and Ahmad Fauzi bin Abdul Hamid 1998.
8. For a discussion on the lifestyle and establishment of a comprehensive Islamic system endeavored by Darul Arqam, see Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992.
9. The government, and in particular Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad himself, has been critical of several Malaysian Islamic speakers. Among others, he has taken offense with former Professor of Islamic Studies, Dr. Harun Din, and the former Mufti of Selangor Dato' Ishak Baharom. While the former was criticized as a self-interested healer, the latter was sacked because of his strict actions against Muslim participants of a beauty contest. Mahathir has also questioned the importance of covering the *awrah* among women and the keeping of beards for men. In addition, he is seen as being apathetic towards blasphemy (*murtad*), a problem which is viewed as increasingly common.
10. Interview with the ABIM President at his office in 1997.
11. For a detailed explanation on the history and concept of *homeostasis*, see Saari Sungib 1997:25-30.
12. Interview with Saari Sungib, the JIM Founder-President in 1997.
13. For JIM's theoretical reasons, based on the ideas of Muhammad Rashid Reda, Sayyid Qutb, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Khaldun, see Saari Sungib 1997:23-24.
14. Kelantan is almost synonymous with PAS for the state has been under PAS rule for a long period. Unlike the neighboring state of Terengganu which was ruled by PAS for only a short period (1959-1962), Kelantan has been under PAS twice, each for quite a substantial period. The first rule, beginning just after independence in 1959, was for a period of 18 years (1959-1978), and the second, which is still prevailing now, is already in its ninth year (1990-present). The interval between the two rules, viz. when the Barisan Nasional ruled the state, was only about twelve

- years (11 March 1978 to 21 October 1990). After that, in the 1990 General Election, PAS made a comeback by an overwhelming victory in Kelantan. The victory, by winning all the 39 State and 13 Parliamentary seats, was achieved through the PAS-led opposition coalition Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah. In the 1995 General Election the victory was repeated again, though this time with a lesser majority. To date, Kelantan has been under PAS control for a total of twenty-five years. For a detailed discussion see Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1996.
15. For a discussion on the PAS' experiment, see Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1996.
  16. During the last general election, in 1995, UMNO won a majority of about 7,000 votes. The one thousand majority won by PAS in this by-election reflects a clear shift of about 8,000 votes from UMNO to PAS.
  17. PAS attributes such a change in support partly to the failure of the UMNO-led government to overcome the present economic crisis and to many people's belief that only an Islamic system could provide an effective solution to the crisis. Among UMNO leaders who have joined PAS are Tendong (Kelantan) State Assemblyman Haji Hussein Ahmad, former Secretary to Kedah Chief Minister Cikgu Nayan and former Executive Council Member of UMNO Youth in Kubang Pasu, Kedah Tarmizi (*Harakah*, 14 August 1998).
  18. See *Harakah*, 28 December 1998.
  19. See *Harakah*, 8 February 1999.
  20. See Ahmad Lutfi Othman 1998a.
  21. See the cassette tape by Ustaz Kamal Ashaari entitled *Mayat Bertukar Menjadi Khinzir*, 1998.
  22. This has proven to be a significant base from PAS has been able to attract more membership, especially when Anwar was unceremoniously sacked from the government. Viewing the sacking as a confirmed indication of increasing injustice from which even the Deputy Prime Minister himself was not immune, the Muslim masses have been turning to PAS as an alternative. This is added by the annoyance of the masses with the government's treatment of Islam and issues relating to the economic downturn, corruption, cronyism, nepotism, extravagant mega-projects, industrial urban-bias, detention without trial under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA), police brutality, increased higher education fees, frequent increase of highway tolls price, apathetic attitude towards blasphemy and so forth. All these have become valuable assets for PAS, molding avenues for a stronger anti-establishment attitude not only among PAS members, but also among the masses.
  23. See Ahmad Lutfi Othman, 1998a
  24. See cassette tape entitles *Bangau Oh Bangau* or *Keris Oh Keris* (1988), a recording of a discussion on Islam in a meeting between the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers of the Malaysian states.
  25. Jamaat Tabligh, is excluded from this group, as it is more focused on changing the inner-self of the individual rather than the society.

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