

Policing, *Hisbah* & the Present Challenges of Religious Law Enforcement in Malaysia

doi 10.15408/ajis.v25i2.42441

Siti Zubaidah Ismail

University of Malaya

szubaida@um.edu.my

Abstract

This article explores the concept of *hisbah*, which is commanding the good and forbidding the evil, and the practice of religious policing in Malaysia. It discusses the role of Religious Enforcement Officers within the framework of sharia criminal law. By using the qualitative doctrinal research approach, the study analyses statutory provisions and scholarly literature to identify operational issues in religious enforcement. Findings reveal that religious enforcement officers (REOs) operate within clear legal frameworks, leading to the consistent application of the law, and are regulated by the Shariah Criminal Procedure Law. There are several key challenges in performing these duties, including ambiguous statutory provisions, evidentiary difficulties, loopholes in addressing new and complex offences, and tensions between enforcement duties and privacy concerns. The article concludes that to maintain legitimacy and public trust, reforms are necessary to clarify legal ambiguities and ensure that enforcement remains within lawful and ethical boundaries, thereby balancing religious duties and civil liberties.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji konsep *hisbah*, yaitu memerintahkan yang ma'ruf dan mencegah yang munkar, serta praktik polisi agama di Malaysia. Artikel ini membahas peran petugas penegakkan agama dalam kerangka hukum pidana syariah. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian doktrinal kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis ketentuan perundang-undangan dan literatur akademik untuk mengidentifikasi isu operasional dalam penegakkan agama. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa petugas penegakkan agama beroperasi dalam kerangka hukum yang jelas, sehingga penerapan hukum berlangsung secara konsisten, dan diatur oleh Undang-Undang Prosedur Pidana Syariah. Ada beberapa tantangan utama dalam melaksanakan tugas ini, termasuk ketentuan undang-undang yang ambigu, kesulitan pembuktian, celah hukum dalam menangani pelanggaran baru dan kompleks, serta ketegangan antara tugas penegakkan dan masalah privasi. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa untuk menjaga legitimasi dan kepercayaan publik, diperlukan reformasi untuk memperjelas ambiguitas hukum dan memastikan bahwa penegakan tetap berada dalam batas hukum dan etika, sehingga menyeimbangkan antara kewajiban agama dan kebebasan sipil.

Keywords:

Law enforcement; Religious enforcement; Sharia criminal law; Sharia; *Hisbah*

How to Cite:

Ismail, S. Z. (2025). Policing, *Hisbah* & the Present Challenges of Religious Law Enforcement in Malaysia AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah, 25(2). <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v25i2.42441>

Introduction

Policing is a modern concept of ensuring public order in society. It is a social control method, in addition to law and punishment, that the government uses to maintain control and social order in society. Certain countries with a religious system of governance deploy religious police to control undesirable behaviour that goes against the teachings of the religion and societal norms. Religious policing is concerned with raising awareness of religious teaching, values and principles through guidance and social correction. Particularly in Muslim countries, the function of religious policing and the role of commanding the good and forbidding wrong (*al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*) has become a pervasive topic in contemporary social and legal discourses. It serves as a foundation of good deeds and a vehicle for preserving public order. Nowadays, their operations extend beyond the parameters of curbing religious wrongdoings or enforcing religious-related offences by the religious enforcement officer. Laws are enacted to establish clear jurisdictional boundaries and define the scope of enforcement.

Hisbah or religious policing is said to resemble the contemporary concept of the *Ombudsman* in terms of operation. Regulators, inspectors, reviewers, and auditors are all technically *muhtasibs* (*hisbah* officers) in modern nation-state administration and are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring adherence to rules, guidelines, and compliance with regulations (Dogarawa, 2013; Ateis, 2017). Depending on the various scopes and jurisdictions in one's state, however, the religious inspectorate is typically not part of the municipal institution within the framework of a central government. The function of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong has been specifically dedicated to religious authorities, who are typically mandated with the power to enforce adherence to shariah laws and religious obedience among believers. While it is evident that Malaysia has authorized a particular institution in the religious enforcement process, the main questions are to what extent the *hisbah* is authorised to conduct enforcement on sharia criminal offences, and what types of offences should be regulated? What are the legal and operational challenges facing the religious enforcement officers in performing their duties in Malaysia? This article evaluates the concept of religious policing. It examines the position of state-based religious enforcement authorities as modern *muhtasib*, by looking at the institution of religious enforcement offices tasked with ensuring obedience to sharia criminal law among Muslims.

Method

This research employs qualitative and normative legal research in order to study the concept of *hisbah*, the related legal principles and their application by the religious enforcement division in Malaysia. The aim is to gain insight into how the laws operate. Library research and content analysis were adopted to collect and analyse the data. Relevant legal and academic materials were selected through library research, targeting books and journals on Islamic law, hisbah, and the religious enforcement of Islamic criminal law. Online databases like JSTOR and social network services like ResearchGate were also consulted to find scholarly articles. The primary legal resources are the Federal Constitution, the Shariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1984, the Shariah Criminal Offences Act 1997, and the Shariah Criminal Procedure Act 1997 of the Federal Territories. Doctrinal analysis, black letter synthesis and

thematic analysis were conducted to analyse the legal principles, rules and statutory interpretation of shariah criminal offences within the Malaysian legal framework.

Conceptualising Religious Policing: The Dynamic of *Hisbah* & the Birth of *Muhtasib*

In modern governance, *hisbah* represents moral accountability within administrative and legal systems through the establishment of religious enforcement departments, anti-corruption agencies, and other institutions that uphold ethical governance and public welfare. The concept of *hisbah* is based on the Quranic notion and encouragement for Muslims as the best community (*khayr ummah*). The philosophical foundation of *hisbah* is found in the Quran (Q3:104), in which Allah says to the effect:

And let there be (arising) from you a nation inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be successful.

One of the criteria for being the best among people is the attitude of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Such a command generally reminds Muslims at large of their moral responsibility and the authorities of their obligation to ensure adherence to religion while also maintaining public order. In another verse of Q3:114, Allah mentioned the characteristics of the People of the Book:

They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: They are in the ranks of the righteous.

In this verse, four qualities are mentioned, which are belief in Allah and the hereafter, command good, forbid evil and hasten to do good deeds. These traits could form the foundation of moral governance and social responsibility. In one hadith, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was reported as saying:

For those who witness a vicious act, he must rectify with his hand (power); if he cannot afford it, he must do so with his tongue (advice); and if he (still) cannot afford it, then do it with his heart, and that is the weakest level of faith (Hajjaj,1996).

Based on the above sources, the concept of enjoining good virtue and forbidding vicious wrong shows that Islam puts a strong emphasis on the duties of every individual in their capacity to remove all kinds of vice (*munkar*) by encouraging acts of virtue (*ma'ruf*). Many have written about *hisbah* as a mechanism for dynamic legal order as widely practiced during the Prophet's time and throughout Islamic history. Scholarly interest ranges from historical, ethical and economic perspectives, to the interplay between the theory and practice of *hisbah* which add to the enriching literature on public inspection and inspectorate as well as the development of *hisbah* and *muhtasib* (Stilt, 2006; Klein, 2006; Lange, 2016; Whittman, 2016). The term *muhtasib* refers to the person who conducts the *hisbah* known as "guardian of the public space" (Azhar, 2018; Azhar & Badarulzaman, 2018).

Long before it became part of a state's duty, it was an exemplary move established by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (577-632 AD) as an endogenous process in social change. As an example, there is the hadith in which the Prophet noticed a vendor selling fresh wheat in the Madinah market. When the Prophet slipped his hand inside the layer of wheat, he found the wheat was wet underneath. The vendor was cheating in his sale of fresh wheat, which was a basic food item. The Prophet reprimanded this practice (Hajjāj, 1996). Thus, awareness was raised of the importance to supervise the behaviour of the sellers to avoid unfair dealings and unjust transactions. The example given by the Prophet was a corrective measure to enhance ethics and public morality. Al-Ghazālī (d.1111 A.D), a great theologian and the writer of a landmark book, *Ihyā' `Ulūm al-Dīn*, defines the scope of behaviour to which the order of enjoining goods and forbidding the wrongs applies. According to him, wrong (*munkar*) includes sinful acts and anything forbidden that is presently existing, manifest to the *muhtasib* without spying (Tameer, 2004).

In Islamic history, particularly during the earliest state in Madinah, there were three important institutions of a judicial and quasi-judicial nature: *qaḍā'* (judiciary), *maẓālim* (public complaining bureau), and *ḥisbah* (enforcement). According to al-Māwardī (d.450/1058), one of the great scholars, the jurisdiction of the *ḥisbah* lies midway between that of the judiciary (*qaḍā'*) and that of the complaint bureau (*maẓālim*). *Ḥisbah* started as a practice initiated by the Prophet (PBUH) himself, as previously elaborated, who used to inspect the marketplace, which was the foremost area of *ḥisbah*. The aim was to supervise the ethics and behaviour of the buyers and sellers to avoid fraud and unjust transactions. Many *muhtasibs* were appointed by the Prophet, including Sa`id bin al-`Aṣ in Mecca and `Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb in Madinah, and also *mutatawwi`* (volunteers), who felt called upon to see that the good was maintained. This practice was then followed by the rightly guided caliphs (Tajul Urus et. al., 2022). Over time, the role of *ḥisbah* became important. *Ḥisbah* is said to be both a moral and socio-economic institution. What started as a market inspector (*`āmil sūq*) inspecting the marketplace, turned into ensuring adherence to religious rules in the public sphere. The law was enacted in response to societal needs (Iskandar et al., 2024; Zada, 2023). The practice of *ḥisbah* continues to be expanded throughout Muslim territories during the glorious eras of the Abbasid, Umayyad, Seljuk, and pre-modern Ottoman periods (Peters, 2005: 75).

Contemporary *Ḥisbah*: from *Muhtasib* to Religious Enforcement Officers

Policing in the realm of morality and economic activities symbolizes a state's emerging Islamization (Zada et al., 2022; Deris & Haidar, 2015; Dogarawa, 2013). What started as regulators for market surveillance to prevent fraud and unjust transactions between traders and consumers in conducting business has developed into a wider sphere of activities, encompassing public morality, performing Friday prayers, and regulating vehicles on public roads. According to Pew Research, in 2014, at least 17 nations (9% worldwide) had police forces that enforced religious norms, particularly in the Middle Eastern and North African regions, as well as the Asia-Pacific region, including Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. All these countries have state bodies that enforce sharia offences law with varying scopes of powers and jurisdiction. In the Middle East and North Africa region, 35% of countries have such a force.

Pew also listed three countries, namely Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, as countries with "very strict restrictions on religion" (Theodorou, 2014).

In Afghanistan, the country's image of religious police going around with a stick, bashing women who expose their body parts which should be covered (*awrāt*), men escaping Friday prayer, was beyond the ordinary law enforcement (Mubarak et al., 2023; Ekanoviarini & Wibowo, 2022). Lack of adherence to freedom of expression within the ambit of human rights is part of the objection by those wanting to depart from observing religious norms in the public sphere. Enforcing public morality has been accused of being an invasion of privacy and personal rights (Syed Shamsuddin & Hashim, 2017).

Religious policing often brings up images of so-called moral policing and vigilante squads patrolling the streets. The subject of implementation primarily concerns what constitutes immorality, thereby giving rise to the term "moral policing," even though the scope of enforcement extends beyond moral boundaries. Other violations of Islamic law are also typically regulated. Examples include tackling the consumption of intoxicant drinks in public, sex work (Olaniyi, 2011), and theological deviances such as spreading the un-Islamic teaching among Muslims, contempt of religion, blasphemy, and heresy. Examples of religious squads enforcing those provisions can be seen in Afghanistan (Mohammad & Conway, 2003), northern states in Nigeria (Nmehielle, 2004), the Middle East (Crystal, 2001), Aceh in Indonesia (Ismail, Zakaria & Zakaria, 2024; Suma et al., 2020), and Malaysia (Ismail, 2016). Various approaches are taken to enjoin the good and forbid the wrong. For example, in Kano, Nigeria, the police-public partnership was utilized to form a vigilante group, as it is considered the most effective way to tackle the so-called communal conflict (Hills, 2014). Differences in the scope of religious policing from one country to another are related to the extent of power and jurisdiction accorded by the country's legal system.

According to Otto, there are three classifications of legal systems in Muslim countries: a mixed system, a fully classical sharia system, or a secular system (Otto, 2010). In Afghanistan, for example, the Department for the Preservation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has been established at the national level. In Brunei Darussalam, under the Shariah Penal Code, the Royal Brunei Police Force and the Religious Enforcement Division, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, cooperate on investigations of crimes covered by both secular law and sharia law (Ismail & Awang Haji Amai, 2023). In Aceh, the only province in Indonesia with the autonomous power to implement sharia law, the agency known as *Wilayatul Hisbah* has had the power since its first establishment in 2006 to curb the occurrence of offences provided under *Qanun Jinayat of Aceh* No.6/2014 (Ismail, 2024; Suma et al., 2020; Otto, 2015). In Iran, the Supreme Leader of the Republic has established the independent Bureau for the Revival of Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong and charged the Basij militia with the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the community. The Basij militia is responsible for the policing of the moral law, including enforcing the Islamic dress code, observing gender interactions, and limiting the spread of Western culture. These morality units employ techniques such as vehicle checks, street patrols, and surveillance, utilizing both covert and overt operations (Kar, 2003). In the Nigerian state of Zamfara, the Zamfara State Hisbah Commission (Establishment) Law was established to ensure sharia compliance in all state and local government activities, as well as to advise state and local government councils on all issues concerning the implementation and application of sharia (Okemuyiwa, 2016).

Contemporary Policing of Sharia Criminal Offences in Malaysia: Institutional Powers & the Jurisdiction of Religious Enforcement Officers

Malaysia is a Southeast Asian country with a total population of 34.1 million. Peninsular Malaysia is located in the west, while East Malaysia is located in the east of the country, on the island of Borneo. There are many different ethnic groups in Malaysia, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, and various native groups. Islam is the religion of Malaysia, and Muslims make up about 62% of the population (DOSM, 2024). The Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the land and was passed in 1957 after the Federation of Malaya gained independence from the British. The federation's legislative and executive powers are divided between the central and state governments. Parliament may legislate on matters in the federal list, whereas the state legislative assemblies may enact legislation on state matters, including Islamic law and the sharia court. Mainstream criminal law, as outlined in the Penal Code, is a statute for general application.

Each state in Malaysia can create “offences against precepts of Islam,” which are applied to Muslims only. Offences against precepts of that religion are offences prescribed under the Shariah Criminal Offences Act/Enactment. The scope is very limited to offences against the religion related to belief, the sanctity of the religion and public decency. Islamic laws apply to Muslims only. The dual-legal system in Malaysia means that Muslim personal matters, including matrimonial, divorce, maintenance, custody, inheritance, and property, are under the state administration. While the Royal Malaysian Police, Customs, Immigration, and Armed Forces are part of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the enforcement of religious offences falls under the jurisdiction of a religious enforcement unit, which is a body under the state's Department of Religion. The sharia court has the power to adjudicate disputes between Muslims on personal matters and to hear charges of sharia offences. For criminal jurisdiction, the sentencing power of the sharia court is limited to imprisonment not exceeding three years, a fine of five thousand Ringgit (equivalent to 15 million Indonesian Rupiah), or flogging six times, as provided under the sharia court (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1984.

Power and Duty of the Religious Enforcement Officer (REO)

The Religious Enforcement Division, a division under the state's Religious Department, is responsible for the enforcement of sharia offences law in all states. REOs are public servants appointed by the state authority to investigate offences under the Shariah Criminal Offences Act or any other written law prescribing offences against precepts of the religion of Islam. The authority is derived from Section 58(4) of the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territory) Act of 1993 as follow:

The Majlis may appoint a Chief Religious Enforcement Officer and Religious Enforcement Officers from among the members of the general public service of the Federation to carry out investigations of offences under this Act or under any written law prescribing offences against the precepts of the religion of Islam.

“*Majlis*” refers to the Islamic Religious Council of the Federal Territory (*Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan*), the main religious authority in the Federal Territory. To assist in carrying out investigations, the Shariah Criminal Procedure Act 1997 (SPCA 1997) of the Federal Territories, as well as similar enactments in other states, outlines the procedures for REOs to follow. Among their duties is to deal with complaints received from the public regarding any suspicion of offences and to have the power to initiate an investigation. Rules and procedures regarding matters of arrest, warrants of arrest, summonses, processes to compel appearance, production of documents, search warrants, and other related matters are provided under this Act. There are numerous provisions regarding the handling of arrest, re-arrest, and escape, as well as the commencement of investigations, the power to arrest and detain, conducting searches of the body and premises, and seizing items related to any suspected crime. A warrant of arrest can only be served within the state where the offence has taken place. The detention of a suspect for interrogation cannot exceed 24 hours, unlike the federal police, who are given the maximum fourteen days to remand a suspect. The enforcement of sharia involves five stages (Ismail, 2017), namely: (1) receiving complaints on a suspicion of the violation of shariah law and identifying the suspect, (2) investigation and collection of evidence including at the crime scene, (3) preparation of the investigation papers after investigation, arrest, confiscation, etc. has been conducted, (4) submission of investigation paper to the Shariah Prosecutor and finally pressing charges at the sharia court by the shariah prosecutor.

The institutionalization of REO means that the public can lodge complaints, and the REO must take action in response to the complaint, adhering to established regulations and standard procedures in its effort to address wrongdoing. A Religious Enforcement Officer or police officer may arrest a suspect without a warrant against whom a reasonable complaint has been made, or credible information has been received, or a reasonable suspicion exists. Section 11 of the Sharia Criminal Procedure Act 1997 clearly outlines the duty of the person in charge of the premises to allow free ingress to the Religious Enforcement Officer and to provide reasonable facilities to facilitate the investigation. In performing their duties and conducting the investigation, necessary assistance from a federal agency such as the Royal Malaysian Police can be obtained. Table 1 below lists the number of REOs by state in Malaysia.

Table 1
Total of Religious Enforcement Officers According to States in Malaysia

States	Total
Federal Territory	107
Selangor	101
Negeri Sembilan	61
Malacca	40
Johor	95
Perak	20
Pulau Pinang	58
Kedah	9
Perlis	4
Pahang	102
Terengganu	20

Kelantan	42
Sabah	15
Sarawak	13
TOTAL	687

(JAKIM, 2024)

Table 1 shows that there are 687 REOs responsible for enforcing shariah criminal laws across all Malaysian states and federal territories. The data shows a disparity in numbers, reflecting the differences in *Waran Perjawatan* (Establishment Warrant) allocated by the Public Service Department (JPA) to each state. States with larger Muslim populations and more shariah cases (like Federal Territory, Selangor, and Johor) have more REOs, while states with smaller Muslim populations (like Sabah, Sarawak, and Perlis) have fewer officers.

Sharia Criminal Offences as a Subject of Regulation

Sharia Criminal Offences are a distinct category within the Islamic legal system in Malaysia. Sharia offences, or rather, offences against the precepts of religion as named by the Federal Constitution, are concerned with the protection of religion and morality. The power to enact these offences is bestowed upon the state authority by the Federal Constitution. Unlike general criminal law, which is a statute for general application, sharia offences are applied only to Muslims, are enacted to be administered by the religious enforcement authority, and are to be tried in sharia courts. These offences are provided for under the Sharia Criminal Offences Law of each state. In Federal Territories for example, the Sharia Criminal Offences Act Federal Territories Act 1997 (SCOA 1997) provide 45 offences that are divided into five categories, namely: (1) offences against belief (*aqidah*); (2); offences against the sanctity of the religion and its institution, (3) offences relating to decency and morality; (4) miscellaneous offences; and (5) abetment and attempt.

The offences that fall under the category of belief relate to wrongful worship and deviant activities directed against Islam. A deviation is defined as any religious act that deviates from the teachings of Islam, and which is not recognised by Islamic law according to any sect. There are four offences relating to belief. Section 3 of SCOA 1997 prohibits wrongful worship, like worshipping nature or committing any act that shows worship or reverence of anything in any manner contrary to Islamic law. Another is teaching or expounding false doctrine and propagating religious doctrines among Muslims other than the beliefs and doctrines of Islam as provided under section 5 of SCOA 1997. Likewise, if a person declares himself or another person to be a prophet, Imam Mahdi, or a *wali*, this is an offence punishable under Section 6 of SCOA 1997. An example is the case of Abdul Kahar bin Ahmad v. Selangor State Government & Another ([1998] 3 MLJ 617) Abdul Kahar proclaimed himself a Malay prophet and had many followers. Upon investigation by the religious enforcement unit, he was charged before the sharia court and found guilty under this section.

The second category is offences relating to the sanctity of Islam and its institution. The various offences under this category are: insulting Quran and Hadith; showing contempt for or defying religious authority or court order; committing any act amounting to heresy or blasphemy; giving opinion contrary to a *fatwā* (religious edict); publishing religious materials contrary to Islamic law; neglecting Friday prayer three times without valid reason;

disrespecting Ramadan; drinking liquor in public; and gambling. The third category is related to morality and decency. This category draws the most attention because it involves offences not only in the public sphere but also in the private sphere. For example, the offence of *khalwat* is defined as a situation in which a man and a woman, who are not *maḥram* (related by blood or marriage), are found together in a secluded place with the likelihood of engaging in immoral behaviour (Ismail, 2016; Samudin, 2025). The offence of *khalwat* has been alleged by some as an invasion of privacy, as enforcement officers often enter private spaces during the course of their investigations (Anwar, 2015). Other offences under the category of morality and decency are incest, prostitution, illegitimate sexual intercourse, heterosexuality, and public indecency. The fourth category is related to attempt and abetment offences. Another category of offences is provided under the Islamic Family Law Act of the Federal Territory of 1984 and is referred to as matrimonial offences. These are offences related to the *'aqd al-nikāḥ* (marriage solemnization) and matrimonial issues such as ill-treatment of wife (section 127), polygamy without court's permission (section 123), desertion of wife (section 126), failure to give proper justice to wife (section 128), and many more.

Challenges in the Enforcement Duty

Despite the explicit legal provisions stipulated under the Sharia Offences Law, religious enforcement officers continue to face significant challenges in conducting their enforcement duties. As officers entrusted with upholding moral and legal order within the Muslim community, REOs encounter multiple operational challenges that hinder their effectiveness and affect how the public perceives them. The following are the main challenges confronting REOs in Malaysia:

The Ambiguous Legal Provisions

The lack of clarity in certain legal provisions remains the main challenge for REOs. Certain provisions are unclear regarding what constitutes a particular offence and what elements need to be gathered and established, thus causing difficulties for the REO to complete the investigation. Although complaints are received, enforcement action cannot be taken because the elements of an offence are uncertain or inadequately prescribed by law. In general, it can be said that there are seven ambiguous offences such as insulting or bringing into contempt the religion of Islam (section 7), *muncikari* (section 22), *musāḥaqah* (section 26), indecent acts in public place (section 29), destroying or defiling mosque (section 32), encouraging vice (section 35) and enticing a female person (section 39). For example, the offence of "indecent act in public place", as provided under Section 29 of the Shariah Criminal Offences Act of Federal Territory 1997 (SCOA 1997) is very general. It states:

Any person who contrary to Islamic law, acts or behaves indecently in any public place, shall be guilty of an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding one thousand ringgit or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to both.

This provision is not accompanied by any explanation of what constitutes an "indecent behaviour or act" in public. It merely prohibits acting or behaving indecently, without defining what indecent means. This has invited criticism contending that the ambiguity of these provisions might lead to excessive discretion, inconsistent application and allegations of

selective prosecution (Ismail, 2025). Criticism also revolves around two questions. One: should one's behaviour in public be regarded as an "offence", and two: what behaviour should be classified as indecent. When the REOs did their job and detained someone, especially a woman, for indecent dressing, they were accused of imposing personal judgment and subjecting women to a personal standard of decency. This happened when Siti Idayu, a 22-year-old pub singer in Perak, was detained for what was described as "improper dressing". She was also alleged to have encouraged immoral activity through her stage act (MacKinnon, 2007). There was a similar reaction when actress Jeslina Hashim was caught wearing a revealing dress in a nightclub in Kuala Lumpur in 2005. Pressure was put on the Religious Enforcement Department respectively to drop the charges against both of them. After all the "interferences," both were released (The Star, 2007).

Another problematic provision is an offence of contempt of religion, as provided under Section 7 of the SCOA 1997, as follows:

Any person who orally or in writing or by visible representation or in any other manner

- (a) Insults or bring into contempt the religion of Islam;*
- (b) Derides, apes or ridicules the practices or ceremonies relating to the religion of Islam, or*
- (c) Degrades or brings into contempt any law relating to the religion of Islam for the time being in force in the Federal Territories, shall be guilty of an offence and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding three thousand ringgit or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to both.*

What constitutes an act of contempt is not spelled out and is therefore subject to various interpretations. In 2022, a woman who stripped down at a comedy club was nearly charged under this section. She was accused of insulting Islam after stripping, while claiming that she had memorised 15 chapters of the Quran. However, after the investigation was completed, no charge was brought against her under this section (Khairulrijal, 2022).

Difficulty in Gaining Evidence

The process of gathering evidence poses particular challenges, especially for those involving deviant teaching and offences relating to *aqidah*. Those deviant activities typically operate secretly and within close-knit groups, making it difficult for REOs to trace their *modus operandi*, gather credible information or obtain witnesses (Johanizam et al, 2024). To curb the activities that go against the teaching of Islam, numerous deviant groups have been declared *haram* by the Fatwa Committee of Malaysia, for example, Al-Arqam, Ahmadiyyah, Ayah Pin, Hizbullah and so on (Khairuddin, 2022). However, the *fatwā* in itself is not sufficient to halt the deviant activities. The case of Ariffin Mohamed, better known as Ayah Pin, for example, the self-proclaimed spiritual leader of the Sky Kingdom movement, was difficult to trace due to the group's secretive nature and remote operations. He was arrested once, but released due to a lack of evidence to charge him for offences like teaching false doctrine and other related offences under the Sharia Criminal Offences Enactment of Terengganu 2001.

Even though the National Fatwa Council has ruled that his teaching is un-Islamic, there has not been enough evidence to arrest him while actively committing those offences related to wrongful worship, teaching false doctrine, propagating religious doctrine and so on. His teaching centre, or the “crime scene” in the remote town of Besut in Terengganu, was demolished by the Land Office because it was erected without permission. The demolition had destroyed the evidence. Ayah Pin went into hiding in southern Thailand, returned to Malaysia and died in 2016. The case was closed. In the case of Kahar Ahmad, the *Rasul Melayu* mentioned before, it took more than five years to bring him to justice in 2009. In the case of neglecting Friday prayer, proving that someone does not attend Friday prayer three times consecutively as required by law is very difficult (Ismail & Awang Mat, 2014).

The latest addition to the list of challenging cases involves the suspected deviant group of *Global Ikhwan Sendirian Berhad* (GISB), the rebranding group of the defunct Al-Arqam, which has been declared *harām* in Malaysia (Ahmad Nizly & Roslam, 2024). The GISB group has just been declared *harām* by several states in Malaysia, namely Pahang, Johore, Pulau Pinang and Malacca. In the state of Selangor alone, approximately 180 followers of GISB have been detained to be investigated under various Shariah Criminal Offences. The alleged crimes are about *aqīdah*, but due to the lack of evidence, the charges may be related to other offences regarding marriage without permission, collecting donations without permission, and possession of unlawful publication (Ahmad Nzly & Roslam, 2024). In short, many cases failed to secure a conviction due to a lack of admissible and direct evidence despite the existence of a *fatwā* declaring such teaching as deviant or *harām*.

Loopholes in Addressing New & Complex Offences

Existing laws do not adequately cover emerging acts that fall outside the legal framework of sharia offences. New forms of misconduct have emerged that are outside of the current statute. Religious enforcement officers have been facing these emerging issues for quite some time. For example, an unauthorized marriage syndicate which is an organized syndicate that arranges or conduct marriages, without legal authorization. There is no clear provision under the Islamic Family Law Act of Federal Territories 1984 to prosecute the operators of these marriage syndicates, particularly those operating across the borders of Southern Thailand or Batam, Indonesia (Ismail, 2023). Their operations typically involve facilitating unregistered marriages, conducting polygamous marriages without sharia court approval and forging documents to circumvent legal requirements (Alias, 2024). Enforcement against such practices is often ineffective because these activities occur outside formal legal channels. This situation creates a legal gap in prosecuting those who facilitate unlawful marriage. At present, the only charge that can be brought against them is abetting unlawful marriage, an offence under Section 133 of the Islamic Family Law Act 1984, which carries a minimum fine of one thousand ringgit, or approximately three million rupiah (Mohd Razif, 2021).

The rise of digital platforms has also complicated the scope of religious enforcement. Acts like contempt of religion, the propagation of deviant teachings and teaching of Islam without credentials (Ibrahim & Samudin, 2022) often transcend physical boundaries and occur in virtual spaces that fall beyond the traditional jurisdiction of state religious authorities. Since existing laws require the offence to be committed in a public place within the state, establishing jurisdiction and identifying the place of the offence becomes problematic when it takes place

in the digital environment. International corporations own many social media platforms, thereby limiting the REO's ability to access user data. Therefore, there is an urgent need for cooperation from the federal cybercrime unit to gain access to user data and verify the authenticity of online content related to offences against religion.

Lack of Remand Order

In the context of shariah enforcement, the REOs are only authorized to detain a suspect for up to 24 hours as provided under the general rule in the Federal Constitution. There is no provision for a remand order under the Shariah Criminal Procedure Act. Therefore, REOs have no legal authority to extend detention or continue the investigation beyond that period (Bustami, 2020). Unlike the police, who may obtain a remand order from the Magistrate according to section 117 of the Criminal Procedure Code to detain a suspect for up to 14 days to facilitate investigation, the REOs are confined to 24 hours to gather evidence. When a suspect is released on bail after 24 hours, the continuity of the investigation is disrupted. In cases involving *Kahar Ahmad* and *Ayah Pin*, mentioned above, REOs had to locate and summon them repeatedly, but most of the time, they ignored the summons and refused to cooperate, thereby disrupting the case momentum and delaying the prosecution. The absence of a remand mechanism within the shariah criminal justice framework reflects a procedural vacuum that weakens the effectiveness of law enforcement.

Balancing Religious Duties with Freedom & Personal Rights

REOs are often criticised as invading people's privacy particularly when dealing with immoral cases such as *khalwat*, indecent dressing or behaviour. If a suspicion arises or the public lodges a complaint, the REO will have to determine the related offence to be used as the basis of the investigation. Privacy-related offences, such as *khalwat* (*mesum* or being in seclusion with a non-mahram under Qanun Jinayat Aceh), are the most prevalent cases compared to other sharia offences (Hamid et al., 2015). It can be said that *khalwat* suspicion is the most frequently received complaint from the public, and REOs are empowered to enter private premises during investigation (Ismail, 2016).

When investigations are conducted in secluded places, such as hotel rooms, private residences, and vehicles, critics argue that this constitutes an encroachment on personal freedom and privacy, thereby violating the constitutional rights under Article 5(1) (personal liberty) and Article 11 (freedom of religion) of the Federal Constitution. The enforcement officers are labelled as "moral police" for allegedly enforcing personal judgments and the sharia laws as "religious sin [that] has become a crime against the state" (Anwar, 2015). The fact is that, if the public has made a complaint regarding any suspicion of an offence, REOs have the power to investigate in accordance with the standard procedures under the Sharia Criminal Procedure Act 1997. Critics have also argued that the shariah offences which criminalise consensual adult relationships (adultery) or enforcing dress codes are capable of intruding on personal freedom of choice and private life (Syed Shamsuddin & Hashim, 2017). In the case of *Muhamad Juzaili bin Mohd Khamis and Others v. State Government of Negeri Sembilan* ([2015] 6 MLJ 736) the accused was detained for cross-dressing, an offence under section 66 of the Negeri Sembilan Sharia Criminal Enactment of 1992. This provision prohibited men from wearing women's attire in public places. Juzaili claimed he was diagnosed with a

syndrome called gender identity disorder (GID) and therefore, has a tendency to dress both as a woman and a man. In fact, he had been detained several times by the REOs. His submission was that he should not be required to obey rules that contradict his personal choice and preferences. He went on to challenge the law in the civil court but was unsuccessful.

In the case of apostasy or an attempt to renounce Islam, it was also alleged to conflict with freedom of religion. In the case of *Kamariah Ali and Others v. Kelantan State Government* ([2005] 1 MLJ 197), a woman and three men who were detained for practising religious doctrine contrary to Islam were convicted and sentenced by the shariah court. They challenged the law in the federal court and claimed that they have the right to leave Islam and, therefore, are not subject to shariah laws anymore. Thus far, the Court has rejected the argument of human rights infringement and affirmed that the shariah laws are valid and constitutional.

Elaboration of Finding

The system of religious enforcement in Malaysia operates through rule-based institutions that implement sharia laws within a legally pluralistic framework, where civil and Islamic laws coexist. The institutionalization of religious enforcement within the specific context of law enforcement in Malaysia is guided by the ideals of moral governance through the ethical principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*. The state provides the authority and jurisdictional boundaries of Religious Enforcement Officers to enforce the Sharia Criminal Offences law. Religious enforcement officers are government bureaucrats, not the moral police. They are empowered to enforce the Sharia Criminal Offences law, which outlines more than forty offences, ranging from deviant teachings and moral offences to other offences against the sanctity of religion. To enforce the law, they must follow the standard operating procedures outlined in the Sharia Criminal Procedure Act. Having an explicit provision of authority for REOs and standard procedural law to facilitate the performance of their duties ensures transparency in enforcement. Without this, institutionalized efforts to promote good and prohibit wrong could be mistaken for unsystematic moral policing or the enforcement of personal standards on others.

Combating vice in the public sphere and encouraging virtues are needed for social control. This is also in line with the concept of bureaucracy, which operates based on rational-legal authority, as introduced by Max Weber (1864-1920). With the existing number of REOs however, it is still insufficient and requires a larger number of enforcement officers and bigger budget allocation. In terms of substantive laws that are ambiguous in nature, it clearly curtails the efficiency of REOs in performing their duties. REOs can be strengthened through institutional improvement of enforcement agencies. Establishing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for investigation, evidence handling, and public engagement would enhance their professionalism, thereby avoiding accusations of inconsistent enforcement, subjective moral judgment, and selective prosecution. Another emerging challenge in religious enforcement relates to shariah offences committed online. Capacity building through continuous training in digital forensics, ethics and human rights would improve REOs competency. Cooperation and coordination with the cybercrime unit under the Royal Malaysian Police would also enhance the professionalism of the REOs.

Conclusion

This article evaluates the concept of religious policing as part of *hisbah* and its application in contemporary Malaysia. To carry out the function of enjoining good and forbidding evil, religious enforcement officers are empowered to perform their duties within the scope of Sharia Criminal Offences enacted by the states. The accusation that sharia laws curtail personal liberties is inaccurate. Even though these laws have not been free from controversy, they are vital to ensure adherence to Islam and preserve the moral fabric of Muslim society, especially in Malaysia, where Islam is constitutionally recognised as the federal religion. Despite numerous challenges, Malaysia remains committed to promoting and enforcing sharia criminal law.

References

- Ahmad Nzl, AS et al., (2024). Sejarah Ajaran Sesat di Malaysia: Analisis Terhadap Faktor-Faktor Kemunculan dan Langkah-Langkah Menangani. *Applied History Journal of Merong Mahawangsa*, 2:132-143.
- Alias, Mohamad Aniq Aiman. (2024). Pemalsuan Dokumen Perkahwinan: Analisis Terhadap Peruntukan Berkaitan dan Kajian Kes di Mahkamah Syariah Malaysia. *Kanun: Jurnal Undang-Undang Malaysia*, 36(2).161-180.
- Anwar, Z. (2015). Enforcing Public Morality. <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my> (retrieved 2/1/2023)
- Ateis, Hamzah. (2017). A Pioneering Institution for Ombudsman: Hisbah. *Ombudsman Akademik*. Yil:3 Sayi:6 Tarih:Ocak-Haziran:21-48 (www.dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/499891)(retrieved 5/11/2025)
- Azhar, Alias & Badarulzaman, Muhammad Hafiz. (2018). Pendekatan Amar Makruf Dan Nahi Mungkar Dalam Kerangka Hisbah: Amalan Penguatkuasaan Jenayah Syariah Di Malaysia. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 3(9), 57–68.
- Azhar, Alias. (2018). Integrasi Hisbah dan Dakwah dalam Prosedur Penguatkuasaan Undang-Undang Kesalahan Maksiat dan Jenayah Khalwat di Malaysia. *Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran*, 18(1),119-138.
- Bustami, T. Aris Ahmad. (2020). Islam and Shariah Offences in Malaysian Constitutional Framework: Issues and Challenges. *International Conference on ASEAN Perspective and Policy (ICAP)*. No 3(5) (October 3, 2020):153–162. <https://jurnal.Pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICAP/article/view/286> (retrieved 4 October 2025)
- Crystal, J. (2001). Criminal Justice in the Middle East. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 29, 469–82.
- Deris, I. & Haidar, H. (2015). Penggunaan Garis Panduan dan Etika Dalam Penambahbaikan Perjalanan Penguatkuasaan dan Pendakwaan Kesalahan Syariah. *KANUN*,27(1),102–121.
- Dogarawa, A. B. (2013). Role of Hisbah Institution in Ensuring Ethical Business Practices: Reflection for Shariah Implementing States in Nigeria. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 6(1), 51–63.
- DOSM, Department of Statistics Malaysia at <https://www.dosm.gov.my> (retrieved 28/10/2024)

- Ekanoviarini, T. R. & Wibowo, Aji. (2022). Pelanggaran Hak Perempuan Di Afghanistan Selama Kekuasaan Rezim Taliban Berdasarkan Konvensi CEDAW. *Reformasi Hukum Trisakti*, 4, 715-729.
- GISB: Majlis Agama bertindak, focus jenayah syariah. *Sinar Harian*. (2 October 2024) sinarharian.com.my(retrieved 3/11/2024)
- Hajjāj, Muslim al-. (1996). *Sahīh Muslim*. Turkey: Dār al- Ṭabā’ah al-Amīrah
- Hamdani, A. (2008). The Muhtasib as Guardian of Public Morality in the Medieval Islamic City. *Digest of Middle East Studies*,7(1),92–104.
- Hamid, Noor Ashikin et al. (2015). *Khalwat* (Close Proximity) Among Youngsters in Malaysia and Aceh: A Study Concerning Shariah Compliance. *Kanun: Jurnal Undang-Undang Malaysia*, 27(2),297–313.
- Hills, Alice. (2014). Partnership Policing: Is it relevant in Kano, Nigeria? *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 145(1),8-24.
- Ibrahim, N. & Samudin, S. Aisyah. (2022). Cabaran Penguatkuasaan Undang-Undang Bagi Kesalahan Jenayah Syariah Mengajar Agama Tanpa Tauliah Di Alam Siber: Kajian Di Bahagian Penguatkuasaan Undang-Undang Jabatan Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan. *Journal of Shariah Law Research*. 7(2),241–271.
- Iskandar, M et al., (2024). Extrajudicial Trend in Shariah Law Enforcement: Customary Justice or Vigilantism?. *PETITA: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum dan Syariah*, 9(2),624-640
- Ismail, S. Zubaidah (2023). “Apa barakahnya kahwin lari ke Siam?”. (1 Disember 2023) <https://www.utusan.com.my/rencana/2023/12/apa-barakahnya-kahwin-lari;ke-Siam?> (retrieved 10/10/2025)
- Ismail, S. Z. & Awang Mat, M. Z. (2007). Polis Moral dan Masyarakat Sifar Jenayah: Cabaran Bahagian Penguatkuasaan dan Pendakwaan Jabatan Agama Islam Dalam Usaha Pencegahan Jenayah Syariah. *Islam dan Isu-Isu Kontemporer: Respon Islam Terhadap Problematika Global dan Kearifan Lokal*, Surabaya: PT Sunan Ampel.
- Ismail, S. Zubaidah & Awang Mat, M. Z. (2014). Kesalahan Berkaitan Sembahyang Jumaat: Tinjauan Dari Perspektif Fiqh dan Undang-Undang Kesalahan Jenayah Syariah. *IKIM Law Journal*, 13, 1–20.
- Ismail, Siti Zubaidah Ismail & Norasiah Awang Haji Amai (2023). Dari Keadilan Raja Kepada Undang-Undang Agama: Perkembangan Semasa Islam di Brunei. *Jurnal al-Tamaddun*, 18(1), 29-44.
- Ismail, S. Z. et al., (2024). Qanun Jenayah Syariah dan Penguatkuasaannya oleh Wilayahul Hisbah di Aceh: Sejarah, Isu dan Cabaran. *Undang-Undang Islam Malaysia dan Indonesia: Kesatuan dalam Kepelbagaian*. Kuala Lumpur: UM Press.
- Ismail, S. Zubaidah. (2024). Reviu terhadap kes-kes penentuan status agama di Malaysia. In *Proceedings CFORS i-CONF, vol.2 (2024)*. USIM: 2nd CFORS International Conference on Shariah, Law and Science (CFORS i-CONF 2024) 7/11/2024.
- Ismail, S. Zubaidah. (2016). The Legal Perspective of *Khalwat* (Close Proximity) as a Shariah Offence in Malaysia. *PERTANIKA Journal of Social Science and Humanities*. 14(3),923–935.
- Ismail, S. Zubaidah.(2025). *Undang-Undang Tatacara Jenayah Syariah di Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Pustaka.
- Jawi Arrests Woman Who Stripped Down at Comedy Club, Expected to be Charged Under Syariah Law. The Sun. July 19, 2022. <https://www.thesundaily.my/home/jawi-arrests-woman-who-stripped-down-at-comedy-club> (retrieved 17/1/2023)

- Johanizam, A. H et al., Ajaran Sesat sebagai Ancaman Akidah dan Sosial di Malaysia: Analisis Faktor, Kesan dan Tindakan Pencegahan. *E-Journal of Islamic Thought and Understanding*. 7(2).90-107. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.24191/ejitu.v7i2.7343>.
- Kar, Mehrangiz. (2003). The Invasion of the Private Sphere in Iran. *Social Research*,70(3), 829-836.
- Khairuddin, WH (2022). Kerangka Kajian Ajaran Sesat Menurut Ahli Sunah Waljamaah, *Journal of Ifta and Islamic Heritage*, 1(1),120-149
- Khairulrijal, R. (2022). "Siti Nuramira not charged today: Jawi to contact her when they are ready". <https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2022/07/814921/siti-nuramira-not-charged-today.20/7/2022> (retrieved 13/1/2023)
- Klein, Y. (2006). Between Public and Private: An Examination of Hisba Literature, *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 7, 41–62.
- Kondgen, O. (2010). Shariah and National Law in the Sudan. *Shariah Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal System in Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.
- Lange, Christian. (2006). Hisba and the Problem of Overlapping Jurisdictions: An Introduction to, and Translation of, Hisba Diplomas in Qalqashandi Subh al-A`sha. *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7, 85–107.
- Levy, R. (translator). (1939). *Maalim al-Qurba fi Ahkam al-Hisbah, by Diya' al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Qurashi al-Shafie, also known as Ibn al-Ukhuwwah*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacKinnon, I. (2007). Malaysian Band Detained After Singer's Top Reveals Bare Skin. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jul/07/malaysia?CMP=share_btn_url (retrieved 11/10/2025)
- Mohammad, F & Conway, P. (2003). Justice and Law Enforcement in Afghanistan under the Taliban: How Much Is Likely to Change?. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management* 26(1),162-67.
- Mohd Razif, Nurul Huda. (2021). Nikah Express: Malay Polygyny and Marriage-making at the Malaysian–Thai Border. *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 16(2), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asjcl.2021.5>.
- Mubarrak, H et al., (2023). Contestation on Religious Interpretation in Contemporary Aceh Shariah: Public Caning in Prison as the Case of Study, *JURIS Jurnal Ilmiah Syari`ah*, 22(2),213–222.
- Nmehielle, V. O. O. (2004). Shariah Law in the Northern States of Nigeria: To Implement or Not to Implement, the Constitutionality Is the Question. *Human Rights Quarterly* 26(3), 730–759.
- Okemuyiwa, A. A. Z. (2016). Shariah Enforcement by Hisbah: A Constitutional Derogation. *Ideal Journal of Art and Humanities* 2(5), 234–240.
- Olaniyi, R. O. (2011). Hisbah and Shariah Law Enforcement in Metropolitan Kano. *Africa Today* 57(4), 70-96 (<https://doi.org/10.2979/africatoday.57.4.71>)
- Otto, J. M. (2015). Shariah Police in Banda Aceh: Enforcement of Islam-based Regulations and People's Perceptions. *Islam and the Limits of the States: Reconfigurations of Practice, Community and Authority in Contemporary Aceh*. Leiden: Brill.
- Otto, J. M. (2010). *Shariah Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal System of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.
- Qarnī, ‘Alī b. Ḥasan al-. (1994). *al-Ḥisbah fī al-Māḍī wa al-Ḥādīr*. Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd.

- Peters, R. (2005). *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law: Theory and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-first Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Samudin, Siti Aisyah (2025). Perbezaan Peruntukan Kesalahan Khalwat dan Persediaan Persetubuhan Luar Nikah: Kajian Terhadap Peruntukan Enakmen Jenayah Syariah (Selangor) 1995. *Journal of Shariahh Law Research*,10(1), 89-112
- Shafie, M. ibn Muhammad al-Qurashi al- (1939). *Maalim al-Qurba fi Ahkam al-Hisbah of Diya' al-Din*. (translated by Reuben Levy). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stilt, Kristen. (2006). Recognising the Individual: The Muhtasibs of Early Mamluk Cairo and Fustat. *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 7, 63-84.
- Stilt, Kristen. (2011). *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Suma, M A et al., (2020). The Implementation of Shari'a in Aceh: Between the Ideal and Factual Achievements. *AHKAM Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 20(1),19-48
- Syed Shamsuddin, Syed Salim & Hashim, Hasnizam. (2017). Konsep Pengawasan Moral Dan Hak Asasi Manusia: Tinjauan Mengikut Perundangan Syariah. *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law*. 6, 114–137.
- Tajul Urus, NS et al., (2022). Hisbah (Ombudsmen) is A Mechanism for Resolving Enforcement Issues in Malaysia: Changes and Difficulties. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 12(1), 1933–1941.
- Tameer, M. (2004). *Ihyā' Uhum al-Dīn li Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*. Beirut: Dār al-Afaq al-Arabiyyah.
- Theodorou, A. (2014). Religious Police are found in Nearly One in Ten Countries Worldwide. Pew Research Center, March 19, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/19/religious-police-found-in-nearly-one-in-ten-countries-worldwide/> (retrieved 3/1/2023)
- The Star. (2007). Singer held over dressing. 6 July 2007, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/stories.asp?file=/2007/7/6/nation/> (retrieved 8/1/2023).
- Whittman, Richard. (2006). The Muhtasib in Seljuq Times: Insights from Four Chancery Manuals. *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 7,108-128.
- Zada, K et al., (2022). Muslim Youth Under Shariah Regime in Aceh: From Accommodation to Resistance. *AL-IHKAM Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial*, 17(2),412-433.
- Zada, K. (2023). Shariah and Islamic state in Indonesia: constitutional democracy, an Aceh experience. *IJTIHAD Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan*, 23(1),1-18.
- Zakaria, Zurul Iman & Nasohah, Zaini. (2019). Cabaran Pelaksanaan Penguatkuasaan Undang-Undang Jenayah Syariah di Negeri Melaka. *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law*, 7(2), 13-26.

