

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 16, Number 1, 2009



DISUNITY, DISTANCE, DISREGARD:
THE POLITICAL FAILURE OF ISLAMISM IN LATE
COLONIAL INDONESIA

Robert E. Elson

THE TAO OF ISLAM: CHENG HO AND THE LEGACY
OF CHINESE MUSLIMS IN PRE-MODERN JAVA

Sumanto Al Qurtuby

THE AUGMENTATION OF RADICAL IDEAS AND
THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN MALAYSIA

Mohd Kamarulnizam Abdullah

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies

Vol. 16, no. 1, 2009

EDITORIAL BOARD:

M. Quraish Shihab (UIN Jakarta)

Taufik Abdullah (LIPI Jakarta)

Nur A. Fadhil Lubis (IAIN Sumatra Utara)

M.C. Ricklefs (Melbourne University)

Martin van Bruinessen (Utrecht University)

John R. Bowen (Washington University, St. Louis)

M. Atho Mudzhar (IAIN Yogyakarta)

M. Kamal Hasan (International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur)

M. Bary Hooker (Australian National University, Australia)

Virginia Matheson Hooker (Australian National University, Australia)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Azyumardi Azra

EDITORS

Jajat Burhanuddin

Saiful Mujani

Jamhari

Fu'ad Jabali

Oman Fathurahma

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITORS

Ady Setiadi Sulaiman

Testriono

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVISOR

Dick van der Meij

ARABIC LANGUAGE ADVISOR

Masri el-Mahsyar Bidin

COVER DESIGNER

S. Prinka

STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492) is a journal published by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (STT DEPPEN No. 129/SK/DITJEN/PPG/STT/1976). It specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular, and South-east Asian Islamic Studies in general, and is intended to communicate original researches and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines.

All articles published do not necessarily represent the views of the journal, or other institutions to which it is affiliated. They are solely the views of the authors. The articles contained in this journal have been refereed by the Board of Editors.

STUDIA ISLAMIKA has been accredited by The Ministry of National Education, Republic of Indonesia as an academic journal (SK Dirjen Dikti No. 23a/DIKTI/2004).

The Augmentation of Radical Ideas and the Role of Islamic Educational System in Malaysia

Abstraksi: Dalam sejarahnya, lebih tepatnya sejak abad ke-19, lembaga pendidikan Islam—baik pondok ataupun madrasah—memainkan peran penting bagi proses perkembangan dunia pendidikan di Malaysia. Beberapa Pondok faktanya berhasil membentuk relasi yang baik dengan beberapa wilayah baik di Asia—Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, India—ataupun dengan wilayah Timur Tengah dan Mesir. Jika pondok-pondok yang tersebar di bagian tengah dan selatan Malaysia semisal Johore, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, dan Perak memiliki relasi historis dengan beberapa pondok di wilayah Jawa—termasuk pondok di Penang and Perak Utara dengan beberapa pondok di Sumatera Utara—maka di negara bagian utara Malaysia pun mengalami proses yang sama. Proses ini berjalan efektif seiring kehadiran sejumlah guru agama asal Thailand selatan yang mengajar di wilayah utara Malaysia seperti Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Kelantan, serta Terengganu.

Dampaknya, sejak saat itu, Malaysia disemarakkan oleh khazanah bacaan yang sangat plural. Dari Indonesia, mereka mengadopsi Kitab Kuning, sebuah kitab yang mencakup beberapa elemen penting tentang ajaran Islam, Fiqh, Tawhid, Hadith, Kaidah Bahasa Arabic serta Tafsir. Beberapa judul yang populer di sana di antaranya Kitab Sarh Ibn Aqil 'ala Alfiyah, Nahw and Sarf, dan Matn al Ajurumiyah—kajian Bahasa Arab—serta Qalyubi wa Umayrah dan Al Asbah wa al Naza'ir fi Qawa'id wa Furu' Fiqh al shfi'I untuk kajian fiqh. Kitab lainnya adalah Matn Arba'in (hadith), Sirojul Huda (Civic), Aqidatun Naajim (Tawhid), Syarhul 'Asmawi (fiqh dan tawhid), Penawar bagi Hari (Tasawuf) yang ditulis oleh para ulama asal daerah Patani, Thailand Selatan. Pada perkembangannya, kitab-kitab ini turut pula dijadikan referensi bagi terbentuknya kurikulum pendidikan Islam Malaysia saat ini.

Artikel ini, selain menjelaskan proses perkembangan dunia pendidikan Islam di Malaysia, berupaya mengungkap sebuah fakta bahwa lembaga pendidikan Islam tersebut dijadikan ruang bagi terciptanya doktrinisasi ideologis atas sebuah keyakinan tertentu. Sistem pengajaran serta kurikulum yang terdapat di beberapa madrasah ataupun pondok di Malaysia saat ini berkecenderungan untuk terseret pada pembentukan embrio gerakan radikalisme Islam yang semakin berkembang pesat. Terlebih, beberapa variabel terlihat terjalin erat, mulai dari kondusifitas lingkungan, kurikulum pendidikan islamis, hingga para pengajar (tuan guru) yang memiliki perspektif ideologis.

Penting dicatat adalah bahwa pada dekade terakhir ini, semakin banyak guru agama di Malaysia yang merupakan alumni perguruan tinggi Timur Tengah, khususnya yang berasal dari Universitas Al Azhar, Mesir. Merekalah yang selanjutnya menjadi tumpuan bagi proses tumbuh berkembangnya lembaga pendidikan Islam di Malaysia semisal sekolah Islam—Sekolah Kebangsaan Integrasi (National Integrative School) dan Sekolah Agama Negeri (SAN)—Pondok Pesantren (Sekolah Menengah Agama Persekutuan [Federal's Secondary Religious School]), Sekolah Agama Independen, Pondok Independen, ataupun Madrasah Independen yang hingga kini berjumlah sekitar 1713 institusi.

Namun, pasca tragedi 11 September 2001, beberapa lembaga pendidikan Islam tersebut mendapat sorotan tajam dari berbagai kalangan, terkhusus pemerintah Malaysia. Terlebih ketika nyatanya laporan South Asian Analysis Group (SAAG) menyebutkan bahwa 167 pelajar Malaysia terdaftar sebagai pelajar di beberapa madrasah Pakistan yang disinyalir memiliki relasi kuat dengan kelompok Al Qaeda dan Jamaah Islamiyyah (JI). Kedua kelompok radikal ini memiliki anggota dan simpatisan yang berasal dari dua ragam latar belakang, yakni mereka yang berasal dari lembaga pendidikan sekular, yang direpresentasikan oleh Azhari Karim, pemimpin JI yang merupakan profesor teknik kimia di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), dan mereka yang merupakan alumni dari lembaga-lembaga pendidikan Islam tradisional baik yang ada di wilayah Asia Selatan, India dan Pakistan, ataupun Asia Tenggara seperti Indonesia, Thailand Selatan, termasuk Malaysia.

Terkait dengan hal tersebut, beberapa tokoh Islam Malaysia seperti, Ahmad Tajudin bin Abu Bakar—ketua kelompok militan Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) yang bermarkas di negara bagian Perak, misalnya, diketahui sebagai alumni Pondok Lanai, Baling Kedah, Malaysia. Begitu juga Nik Adli Nik Aziz—pemimpin nasional KMM—juga dikenal sebagai alumni madrasah Deoband Darul Ulum, India sebelum akhirnya menjadi salah satu staff pengajar di Madrasah Darul Anuar, Pulau Melaka, Kelantan.

The Augmentation of Radical Ideas and the Role of Islamic Educational System in Malaysia

الخلاصة: كانت مؤسسة التعليم الإسلامى بأنواعها فى أرض ماليزيا تلعب دورا هاما منذ ظهورها حوالى القرن التاسع عشر فى تطوير المجالات التعليمية فى هذه البلاد التى يسكنها ٢٧ مليوناً نسمة تقريبا. فى الواقع قد نجحت بعض المدارس فى تعزيز علاقة طيبة مع بعض المناطق فى قارة آسيا، منها باكستان وإندونيسيا وتايلاند، وبعض المناطق فى شرقى الأوساط مثل مصر. كانت المدارس الإسلامية التى انتشرت فى جنوبى ماليزيا وأوسطها مثل فى الولاية جوهور ونيجى سيميلان وسيلانجور وبيراك الجنوبية تربطها علاقة تاريخية مع بعض المدارس الإسلامية فى جزيرة جاوة كذلك بعض المدارس فى بينانج وبيراك الشمالية تربطها العلاقة مع بعض المدارس الإسلامية فى سومطرة الشمالية. ونفس الأمر بالنسبة إلى المدارس الإسلامية فى جزء شملى لشبه الجزيرة ماليزيا. ذلك بمحى عدد من المدرسين الإسلاميين من تايلاند الذين يدرسون فى الولايات الماليزية الشمالية مثل بيرليس وكيداه وبينانج وكيلانتان وتيرينجانو.

على ذلك، تنتشر فى ماليزيا المراجع المتنوعة للغاية، وأخذت من إندونيسيا الكتب الصفراء التى تشمل على عناصر مهمة من التعليم الإسلامية والفقهاء والتوحيد والحديث وقواعد اللغة العربية والتفسير. ومن الكتب المشهورة فيها كتاب شرح ابن عقيل على الألفية والنحو والصرف ومتن الاجرومية وقلوبى وعميرة والأشبه والنظائر فى القواعد والفروع الفقهية فى علم الفقه. والكتب الأخرى مثل متن الأربعين وسراج الهدى وعقيدة الناجين وشرح العسماوى فى علم الفقه والتوحيد وترياق اليوم فى التصوف التى ألفها العلماء الفطانيون من جنوب تايلاند. وفى التطور اللاحق أن هذه الكتب قد ساهمت كمراجع فى تكوين مناهج التعليم الإسلامى الحالية فى ماليزيا.

لم تشرح هذه المقالة تطور المجالات التعليمية فى ماليزيا من ناحية تاريخ ظهورها ونظامها أو من ناحية مناهجها الدراسية فحسب، بل أيضا تسعى على

كشفت حقيقة تتخلص في أن مؤسسة التعليم الإسلامي المذكورة سواء كانت على نظام الشهادة أم غيرها، لا ترمى إلا إلى خلق مجال لتكوين أفكار معينة في الاعتقاد. ويمثل نظام التعليم ومناهجه في بعض المدارس الإسلامية في ماليزيا اليوم إلى زرع البذور لحركة الراديكالية الإسلامية التي تلاحظ تطورها المستمر. بل هناك بعض التغيرات تربط بعضها ببعض، ابتداء من بيئتها ومناهجها الإسلامية حتى المدرسين الذين لهم أفكار أيديولوجية. وجدير بالملاحظة في العقود الأخيرة أن أعداد المدرسين الإسلاميين في ماليزيا في تزايد مستمر هم من خريجي الجامعات في شرقي الأوساط خاصة من جامعة الأزهر بمصر. يعتبر هؤلاء عمودا فقريا لتطور المؤسسات للتعليم الإسلامي في ماليزيا مثل المدرسة التكاملية الوطنية National Integrative School والمدرسة الإسلامية الحكومية Sekolah Agama Negeri (SAN) والمدرسة الدينية الثانوية الاتحادية Federal's Secondary Religious School والمدرسة الدينية الثانوية المستقلة والمدرسة الدينية الشعبية Sekolah Agama Rakyat التي يصل عدد جميعها إلى ١٧١٣ مؤسسة.

لكن بعد حادث ١١ سبتمبر ٢٠٠١ تنتقد الجهات المختلفة خاصة الحكومة الماليزية على بعض المؤسسات للتعليم الإسلامي. بالإضافة إلى تقارير لمجموعة التحليل لجنوب آسيا South Asian Analysis Group's (SAAG) تقول بأن عدد ١٦٧ طالبا ماليزيا المقيدين بالمدارس الباكستانية قد تكون لهم علاقة قوية مع القاعدة والجماعة الإسلامية (Jamaah Islamiyyah (JI). يرى كاتب المقالة أن للجماعتين المذكورتين أعضاء ومؤيدين من الخلفتين: الأولى من مؤسسة التعليم العام التي يمثلها أزهري كريم قائد الجماعة الإسلامية وأستاذ الهندسة الكيميائية في جامعة تكنولوجيا ماليزيا (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)، والثانية من خريجي المؤسسات التعليمية الإسلامية التقليدية الموجودة في جنوب آسيا مثل الهند وباكستان أو في جنوب شرقي آسيا مثل إندونيسيا وتايلاند الجنوبية وماليزيا.

بناء على ذلك أن بعض الشخصيات الإسلامية الماليزية مثل أحمد تاج الدين بن أبي بكر، رئيس المجموعة المتشددة "جماعة المجاهدين الماليزيين" التي لها مركز في ولاية بيرك ماليزيا، كان من خريجي المدرسة لاناي، بالينج كيداه ماليزيا. ونيك عدلي نيك عزيز قائد قومي لجماعة المجاهدين الماليزيين كان من خريجي المدرسة ديوباند دار العلوم بالهند، ثم مدرسا في المدرسة "دار الأنوار"، بولاو مالاكا كيلانتان. يرى أن منهم ظهرت ندبة تقول أن المؤسسة التعليمية الإسلامية تتحول إلى "تربة مولدة للإرهاب الإسلامي" لتخريج الإرهابيين. إذا كانت هذه الندبة في إندونيسيا تمثلها المدرسة الإسلامية "المؤمن بجروكي" بسولو، ففي ماليزيا تمثلها المدرسة "لقمان الحكيم" بجهور التي ترجع إليها وصمة العار لأحوال المؤسسات التعليمية الإسلامية في ماليزيا.

Introduction

The emergence of and the threats posed by Al-Qaeda and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) has created new security challenges that need to be reckoned with. The way these so-called terrorist groups organize themselves, their ability to garner supports from ordinary Muslims and to seek sympathy from newly converted Muslims are a phenomenal aspect of the current study of terrorist threats. The groups do not have formal membership and their activities center on the use of a cell system. What is more important is that these Muslim terrorist groups have contributed to an huge misconception about Islam. Aside of being perceived as a religion of war, Islam is now linked to radicalism and terrorism. Consequently, Islam has become the most miscomprehended religion in the world.

Members and sympathizers to al-Qaeda and JI came from two different backgrounds. The first group is from a secular background. In fact, this group has been the most active and influential in both groups. One of the most wanted JI leaders, Azhari Karim, for instance, was a professor in chemical engineering from Malaysia's Technological University (UTM), one of leading Malaysian universities specializing in technology and advanced techno-engineering. He also received graduate instruction at European universities. The second group consist of the alumni of the traditional Islamic school system, i.e. *madrasahs* and *pondoks* either from South Asia such as Pakistan and India, or from the Southeast Asian region such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and southern Thailand.

Inevitably, it has been widely believed that the traditional Islamic school system i.e. *madrasahs* and *pondoks*, has shaped the ideological way of thinking and the worldly view of those who are involved in terrorist groups. It has also been argued that the *madrasah* educational system produces radical students who are fed-up with Western political discrimination and exploitation. In Southeast Asia, several *madrasah* schools such as the now defunct Madrasah Luqmanul Hakim in Johore, Malaysia and the Madrasah Diniyah in Solo, Indonesia, were identified as one of the breeding grounds of Muslim radicalism in the region. At the same time, graduates from *madrasahs* in Pakistan such as the Darul Uloom Haqqania and the Madrasah Binori have been closely associated with al-Qaeda. Hence, it can be argued the *madrasah* school system is, arguably, to some extent, responsible for the rise of Muslim radicalism since it

produces graduates who struggle to create a united and powerful *ummah* to counter the threats posed by secular ideas.

Based on the above assumption, this article analyses how the Islamic educational system in Malaysia, particularly the role played by *madrasahs* and *pondoks*, shapes its graduates' perception and mindset. The questions that will be raised are therefore: to what extent does Islamic education in Malaysia contribute to the rise of radical Muslims? What aspects of the teachings, pedagogy and/or curriculum provided in the Islamic educational system is capable of generating feelings of hatred against non-Muslims in Malaysia's multi-religious society. Are there other independent variables that may contribute to, and explain why, the Islamic educational school system has been identified as breeding ground for Muslim terrorism? The scope of this paper then focuses on the traditional Islamic educational system especially the partially state funded and privately run *madrasahs* and *pondoks*.

The Evolution of Islamic Education

The *pondok* system established itself on Malaysian soil around the start of the 19th century largely through the active role played by local religious leaders (locally known as *tuan guru*), who came home to Malaysia after their religious educational sojourn in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The *pondok* system is considered the earliest and the traditional form of formal Islamic educational system in the country. The system was privately operated and its success and fame were largely dependent on the reputation of the *tuan guru*. His reputation in turn depended on several factors such as on the duration of his stay in Mecca and the intensity of his association with earlier reputable and famous *tuan gurus* (Kamarulnizam Abdullah 2003). The *pondok* system was mainly criticized for *pondok* its conventional teaching methods. Students were not subjected to neither a systematic curriculum nor to periodic assignments. Students furthermore were discouraged to ask questions or to argue with the *tuan guru*. As a result, the system produced very inward-looking students who lacked intellectual and academic capabilities (Firdaus 1985).

Pondok in Malaysia have historical linkages with other places in Nusantara. In the northern states of the Malaysian Peninsula, the expansion of the *pondok* system was largely the result of close relations southern Thailand. For centuries, these states, Perlis, Kedah (Penang was administratively part of Kedah until the early 19th cen-

tury), Kelantan and Terengganu were part of the Pattani Islamic Kingdom before the Siamese Kingdom defeated it in the late 18th century. In the 1905 and 1907 Anglo-Siamese Treaties, the former areas of Pattani were divided over Siamese and British colonial power largely intended to undermine local opposition to Thai rule (Pitsuwan 1989). Yet close relations between Southern Thailand and the northern states of peninsular Malaysia continued. Shared social structures, language and blood ties explain this close relation. Religious teachers from southern Thailand were well sought after by independent religious schools or *pondoks* in the northern Malaysian states. At the same time, Malaysian students were also sent to *pondoks* in Southern Thailand to study Islam.

The *pondoks* in the central and southern parts of peninsular Malaysia such as Johore, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, and south Perak enjoyed historical ties with *pondoks* in Java whereas *pondoks* in Penang and northern Perak has closed relations with those in northern Sumatra. The ties were due to the blood and ethnic relationships that existed prior to the arrival of colonial powers in the region. There was a free movement of people between the two areas and many Javanese settled at the coastal areas of Johor and Selangor. Hence, the demand of religious teachers (better known as *ustaz* or *kiai*) As this community increased because the Javanese community became larger, the demand for religious teachers (*ustaz* and *kiai*) increased as well. Some of these *kiais* decided to open a *pondok* to serve the community. The arrival of Indonesian teachers either to deliver sermons in mosques or to set up religious schools with the help of locals continued even after the region became two separate states. This explains why Abu Bakr Ba'asyir could be accepted by the local community when he fled Soeharto's regime for fear of prosecution in the 1990s. Abu Bakr Ba'asyir's strategy initially to settle in Banting Selangor was because of the large number of Javanese settlers in the area. After earning the confidence of the local population, he was able to set up the Madrasah Luqmanul Hakim in Kota Tinggi, Johor, which also has a large Javanese community.

Islamic education faced its first wind of changes when *Pondok* Tok Kenali in Kota Bahru, Kelantan, carried out major reformation in the *pondok* educational system during the second quarter of the 20th century by introducing a more systematic class system and grading assessment in evaluating the performance of its students. The reform was partly in response to the Middle Eastern educational reform movements and the arrival of novel *tok guru* teach-

ers who had received higher education from the Middle East. The religious educational reform introduced by Pondok Tok Kenali had paved the way for the introduction of more systematic, modern and formal religious schools within a so-called *madrasah* school system. The opening of this system was in fact pioneered by students who had graduated from Pondok Tok Kenali earlier on. This then was the beginning of a more modern Islamic educational system in Malaysia.

In the new *madrasah* school system, students were consistently evaluated and graded, teachings were based on a pre-designed curriculum, and the subjects taught combined "...an inculcation of interest in world affairs with religious reformist instruction..." (Firdaus 1985:15). Although students were not exposed to secular subjects like Sciences and Mathematics, the educational experience in the *madrasah* system did raise their political consciousness. It also created self-consciousness among students about the plights of Malay-Muslims who were subjugated under British colonial rule. Hence, the *madrasah* system did not only become the pioneer of modern and systematic Islamic schools but also became the venue for the growth of Malay nationalism and political reformation in the country. *Madrasahs* such as Al-Mashyur al-Islamiyah in Penang, al-Hadi in Melaka, Maahad Il-Ehya Assyarif Gunung Semanggul in Perak, and Madrasah Ubudiah in Selangor, were synonymous for, and associated with anti-colonial and nationalist movements in the late 1930s and 1940s (Nabir Abdullah 1976).

The introduction of a more reformed Islamic educational system was also closely associated with the emergence of a conflict between traditionalists and reformists. The reformists, who were also the promoters of the modernization of the *pondok* system, criticized the way the state managed religious affairs. The British did not interfere with matters pertaining to Islam and Malay customs and left these issues to individual sultans because of earlier political agreement between the British and the sultans. Yet the administration of religious affairs was in disarray. Graduates of the *madrasah* system criticized the inability of the state to respond to a modern management system and demanded that religious administration be centralized under one administration only. At the same time, they also asserted that all the sultans had to be stripped of their above-the-law-status and subsequently had to submit to shariah law. They also revolutionized the idea that the authority of Islamic affairs had to be handed over to the council of ulama. The calls, however, were per-

ceived as threats to the sultans' status quo and yet, at the same time did not receive supports from the British because they refused to mingle with the religious matters of the country.

In post-independent Malaysia, the management of Islamic affairs is governed by the Federal Constitution. Islamic affairs continue to fall under the authority of the individual Malay states. Matters such as Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim family law, and religious education, fall under the purview of each individual sultan as he is the head of his state and at the same time the prime protector of Islam. Each state establishes its own Islamic Religious Department (*Jabatan Agama Islam*) to monitor and administer Islamic related matters. The state Religious Department, furthermore is headed by a mufti (head of ulama) who also advises and assists the sultan. Muftis of all the states meet at least once a year in a fatwa committee which is coordinated by the Prime Minister Department's Islamic section. The section was later upgraded into the Islamic Center during Mahathir's tenure and in the early 1990s was renamed the *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (Department of Islamic Advancement) or JAKIM, to streamline the implementation of Islamic administration among states.

On the federal level, the Yang Di Pertuan Agong (hereafter referred as the Agong) is the head of the country. The Agong, elected every five years by the Council of Sultans, also enjoys prime authority over Islamic affairs in states where there is no sultan such as Penang, Melaka, Sabah, Sarawak, and the Federal Territories of Labuan, Kuala Lumpur, and Putrajaya.

In addition, each state has its own mechanism in administrating, formalizing, and promoting Islamic education. Johor, the southernmost state of peninsular Malaysia, is the pioneer of state-supported Islamic education, not intended to become an alternative but to compliment the secular education offered by the Federal Government. Instruction under this Islamic educational system is usually offered after the official school hours. The State Religious Department builds and manages at least one Islamic school in every town and village in the state. The school system uses a modern concept in which well-qualified religious teachers are appointed and basic teaching facilities are similar to those provided by federal educational facilities. Teachers appointed at least hold a Senawi qualification (equivalent to the Religious High School Certificate) recognized by the State Government. In recent years, more and more of these religious teachers also hold a degree in Islamic Studies from

Al-Azhar University in Cairo or from another Middle Eastern or local university.

The state of Selangor has the same system whereas the state of Negeri Sembilan has recently followed suit by offering after-school Islamic education. Unlike in Selangor and Johor, Islamic education in Negeri Sembilan is provided on the federal school compounds due to limited spaces and buildings. Other states however, do not have a formal Islamic educational system and rely on independent or state supported religious schools known as Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) or People's Religious School.

The formal Islamic educational system offered by these three states, Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor is well received and popular among the Muslim community since it gives fundamental religious knowledge to Muslim children from the age of seven to twelve which is not offered comprehensively by the federal secular educational system. Subjects offered at the elementary level include Tawhid, Fiqh, Quranic recital, and prayer. Furthermore, formal Islamic education is offered at the high school level either by a state or by the federal government. The federal government establishes several full-boarding Islamic high schools. Students, admitted to this type of school excelled in the national comprehensive examination at Year Six. Instead of going to a full-boarding secular high school, they applied for an Islamic one. It can be argued that Islamic education offered by an individual state or the federal government (at high school level) is well structured and modern compared to that offered under the independent *pondok* system.

The introduction of state supported religious schools however was not at the expense of *madrasahs* and *pondoks*. The *madrasah* and *pondok* systems continued to exist in post-independent Malaysia. The *pondok* system maintains its very traditional teaching methods without a structured curriculum, whereas the more modernized version of the *pondok* system is carried out by *madrasah* schools. *Madrasahs* continue to flourish in various forms compared to that of *pondok*.

The Attraction of the Islamic Educational System: Pull and Push Factors

Historically, Malay-Muslim parents in Malaysia preferred Islamic education over the secular educational system run by the British. Myths circulated among Muslim parents that English educa-

tion would train their children in, and convert them to Christianity. English schools during the colonial period were thus mostly attended by non-Malay students. As a result, a huge social-economic gap came into being between Malays and non-Malays. Secularly-trained non-Malay children usually became professionals, whereas, the Malay that were religiously educated students became religious teachers or imams. There was a small number of Malay children who graduated from English schools but most of them came from royal or aristocratic family backgrounds.

It is interesting to note, however, that Islamic education remained popular among modern Malaysian Muslim society. The traditional Islamic educational system offered by *madrasahs* and *pondoks* was no longer the preferred choice, and more and more Malay Muslim parents decided to send their children to a formal state funded or partially state funded Islamic schools.

There were no specific reasons why parents decided to send their children to Islamic schools. Generally, however, two factors brought parents to send their children to religious education. The first was religious consciousness and obligation.¹ Where and which Islamic schools the children were sent to was not an important issue for the parents. As long as their children received religious instruction, they were willing to enroll them into either state-funded Islamic schools or private ones, which were run by an Islamic movement or a Muslim political party. For modern Malaysian Muslim parents, the major religious obligation they have in life is to provide their children with spiritual knowledge. This factor is also closely associated with the second one, which is time. Modern Malaysian Muslim parents have difficulties in finding time to teach their children about Islamic matters especially when both parents work. Hence, the availability of private and state-funded Islamic schools serves for their busy lives well. The children thus attend secular educational school in the morning and religious education in the afternoon.

Yet, there is also an increasing number of parents who opt to send their children to Islamic high schools or *madrasahs* that combine secular and Islamic education. Initially Islamic high schools and *madrasahs* attracted students who did not excel in their formative years at the elementary level or those who wanted to deepen their Islamic knowledge with further studies at universities in the Middle East such as the Al-Azhar in Cairo or universities in Medina in mind. But these perceptions tended to change partly because of the evolution of the Islamic educational system especially under the

Mahathir period. The Islamic educational system at the high school level has been afforded due emphasis in the national educational development. Hence, federal funded Islamic high school known as Sekolah Menengah Agama Persekutuan (Federal Religious High School), a full boarding school, and Sekolah Kebangsaan Integrasi were introduced. The Federal Religious High Schools in fact complimented the role and functions of full boarding Federal Science High Schools introduced earlier.² Students who scored high marks in the national comprehensive examination conducted at Year Five (later changed to Year Six) were selected to enroll in this type of school. This type of school system blends secular and religious elements in its teachings. As a result, the Islamic educational system at the high school level was no longer associated with religiously inclined and weak students. What's more interesting is that students who graduated from this type of school furthered their tertiary education at Western universities and chose professional fields such as Law, Engineering, Medicine, Business, and Accounting. The *federal* government's inclination to promote this type of school is very interesting since this kind of role was usually jealously guarded by the individual states. The federal government's active role has opened up a more flexible and modern concept of Islamic education.

At the same time, privately or state funded Islamic schools or *madrasahs*, both at elementary and high school levels continue to receive wide support from parents who are concerned with their children's upbringing. Some privately funded Islamic high schools or *madrasahs* not only offer secular subjects to their students and combine them with religious understanding and flavors but at the same time reintroduce a modified *halaqah* teaching style. In the traditional *halaqah* method, students sat cross-legged in a circle whereas the teacher's spot in the circle was made prominent by a special small-sized carpet and a sitting pillow. There were no question and answer sessions. The *tok guru* would give his sermon based on certain *kitab*s (religious books). Although teachers are surrounded by students during learning sessions, unlike the conventional *halaqah* style, students are now allowed to ask questions and to discuss the subjects they learn.

Privately funded Islamic high schools or *madrasahs* have become increasingly popular among parents. Even students from well to do backgrounds enroll. At the Madrasah Darul Anuar at Pulau Melaka, Kota Bahru Kelantan, for instance, students come from as far as Kuala Lumpur and Johor. The school, which started as an

independent *pondok* in its early stage is a PAS-linked and private Islamic school. It is partially funded by the Kelantan Council for Islamic Affairs and Malay Adat. The school offers both Islamic subjects (such as Tasawuf, Arabic, Fiqh etc) and secular ones (such as Chemistry, History, Biology, Physics, etc.). Students follow the national curriculum for Islamic and secular subjects so that they can sit for the Sijil Pelajaran Tinggi Agama Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate for Higher Religious Studies), which is equivalent to the O-level of the British educational system. Hence, parents believe that their children would be equipped with not only this secular but also religious knowledge.

The *pondok* system, however, remained the same in post-independent Malaysia. Private and independent *pondoks* continue to offer non-official religious education to interested and prospective students. This type of Islamic educational system does not offer formal religious education but offers a combination of the secular and religious system to its students. The background of *pondok* students is also different from that of students of normal religious or *madrasah* schools. There is no age barrier to enroll in the system. Most *pondok* students were high school alumni (who had completed their Malaysia Certificate of Education or SPM) and mature students or pensioners who decided to deepen their Islamic studies/knowledge. These students rent some *pondok* provided by a *tuan guru* (religious teacher) for a certain period of time depending on their financial capability. Their reason to enroll into the *pondok* system is merely to deepen and strengthen their faith and knowledge.

Transforming the Dynamic of Islamic Education

The state government, under the federal political system in Malaysia, continues to play crucial role in promoting Islamic education by not only creating the state-supported religious school system, discussed above, but also by assisting the privately run school system through the state's Religious Affairs Department. Generally, there are five types of Islamic schools in contemporary Malaysia:

1. Islamic schools at elementary and high school levels, financed and administered by State Religious Departments (Jabatan Agama Islam). This includes Sekolah Kebangsaan Integrasi (National Integrative School) and Sekolah Agama Negeri (SAN)

2. Islamic boarding schools (only at secondary level) financed and administered by the Federal Government through the Ministry of Education. Schools are situated in several parts of the country and are called Sekolah Menengah Agama Persekutuan (Federal's Secondary Religious School).
3. Independent *madrasahs* and Islamic high schools known as Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) or People's Religious Schools at elementary and high-school levels. These *madrasah* types of schools are registered with state religious departments. They are also sometimes partially financed by the council or state's Baitulmal (Alms Collection Agency).
4. Independent religious schools run by foundations, Islamic movements or parties usually at the elementary (foundation) level.
5. Independent *pondoks*.

It can be argued that Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) is a modern version of the *madrasah* system. There are 1713 registered SARs in Malaysia of which 223 are religious high schools while the rest are elementary religious schools (see Table 1). A SAR receives financial backing from independent Islamic foundations, individuals, and to some extent from political parties and a small annual grant from the state's Baitulmal (Alms Collection Agency). In recent years, these schools are obliged to register with the state's religious council as well as with the Ministry of Education in order to obtain financial support from the government. The financial support usually covers the administrative part i.e. the salary of the teachers. The registration is also a crucial step for students to enroll in the federal's national examination system offered every year.

**Table 1: Total number of People's Religious Schools (SAR)
– Primary and High School (as in 2005)**

State	SAR (High School)	SAR (Primary School)	Total SAR
Perlis	3	5	8
Kedah	40	2	42
Penang	18	85	103
Perak	38	651	689
Selangor	2	178	181

Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur	0	57	57
Negeri Sembilan	0	72	72
Melaka	0	158	158
Johor	22	9	21
Pahang	15	190	205
Terengganu	10	25	35
Kelantan	73	3	76
Sabah	2	38	40
Sarawak	2	6	8
Federal Territory of Labuan	0	11	11
Federal Territory of Putrajaya	0	0	0
TOTAL	223	1490	1713

Source: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, JAKIM, 2005

Initially, the SARs, traditional *madrasahs*, and *pondoks* were not a major political concern. There has been continuous tug-a-war between the government and major Islamic political parties regarding political infiltration into SARs, *madrasahs* and *pondoks*. The government accused the Parti Islam Malaysia (PAS) of using SAR and *madrasahs* for its political mileage. It has been alleged that some partially state-financed SARs and *madrasahs* were used by PAS to instill hatred against the government. Several PAS-sympathetic *pondoks* were even used by the party recruitment center (*Utusan Malaysia* 25 October 2002).

Yet the September 11 incident has put these types of Islamic schools under closer scrutiny. Several *madrasahs*, *pondoks* and SARs were identified as breeding grounds for militants. Ahmad Tajudin bin Abu Bakar, who was arrested under the Malaysia Internal Security Act (ISA), for instance, was believed to be the head of a local militant group, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) in the state of Perak. He is an alumnus of Pondok Lanai, Baling Kedah. KMM is allegedly linked to a regional terrorist group, the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Another ISA detainee, Nik Adli Nik Aziz, believed to be the KMM national leader, was a member of the teaching staff of the Madrasah Darul Anuar at Pulau Melaka, Kelantan. The *madrasah* has a closely linked to militant Islam since the school was founded by Nik Aziz Nik Mat, PAS's spiritual leader and the Kelantan's current Menteri Besar. In addition, there were several other individuals

who were arrested under ISA who had graduated from independent *madrasahs* or SARs.

The Malaysian Government reacted swift and uncompromising to the alleged involvement of SAR and *madrrasah* alumni or members in spreading radical Islamic ideas and in providing their venues as platforms for government bashing. During the Mahathir administration, it was decided that the government would withdraw the small annual subsidies given to SARs and *madrrasahs* until they met several conditions set by the government. One of the conditions it set was that the schools targeted had to restructure and revamp their academic curriculum by adhering to the national syllabus. The schools were not allowed to teach only religious subjects but had to incorporate non-religious important sciences and vocational subjects. Since most of the teachers did not have any formal training in education, they were also required to attend teaching seminars and courses organized by the federal Ministry of Education. At the same time, individual state governments such as Kedah decided to take over the management of privately funded SARs (*Berita Harian* 2 February 2008). This politically motivated move arguably was to undermine PAS's influence.

The *pondok* system, however, still runs independently in Malaysia. At this moment, no data are available of the number of fully independent *pondok/madrrasahs* that are not registered with the state's religious council. Most *pondoks* are funded through *zakat* (tilts) from Muslims or from a Baitulmal (Alms Collection Agency). In Terengganu for instance, several *pondoks* receive annual grants from the state's religious department. Pondok Al-Falahiah in Kerandang Besut, about 100 km from the capital city of the state of Terengganu, for instance receives 20,000 ringgit annually whereas Pondok Darul Islam Kuala Ibai near Kuala Terengganu received an annual grant of 30,000 ringgit (Haji Abdul Rahman, Interview 10 February 2006). The *pondok* system does not offer formal Islamic education and continues to emphasize the teaching methodology known as *halaqah* which was in use during the colonial period. (Kamarulnizam Abdullah 2003).

This type of independent *pondok* system, especially in Kedah and Kelantan, however, is in a dying stage. This is because the survival of the system, as discussed earlier, rests upon the *tuan guru* and his initiatives. It is common practice for the son(s) of *tuan gurus* or his trusted lieutenants to continue to administer a *pondok* if the *tuan guru* is ill or has passed way. Yet in many cases the *pondok* were left

dying when the *tuan guru* passed away since his son either refused to take over or ventured into other lucrative and recognized professions.

In Terengganu, the state government took several initiatives to modernize the *pondok* system. The strategy is to ensure that the name and the legacy of the *pondok* does not dwindle with the demise of the *tuan guru*. The above-mentioned Pondok Al-Falahiah, for instance, is one the most famous *pondoks* in the state. Nonetheless, the *tuan guru* of the *pondok*, who is also originally from the Pattani province in Southern Thailand, suffers kidney problems and is bed-ridden. He is unable to continue his religious lectures to his students. At the same time, he does not have a trusted lieutenant to continue his legacy and his sons decided to join other professions. Given his age and legacy, the state decided to build a new building complex next to the *pondok*. The building complex is named after the *pondok* and is placed under the concept of the *madrasah* system. The state of Terengganu's move is in fact in line with the current federal government's move to support the school system financially.

Interestingly,⁴ however, the *pondoks* in Kelantan have set up a private consortium to ensure the continuity and survival of the independence of the *pondok* system. There are only 13 *pondoks* left in Kelantan. They form a business entity called Pusat Pembangunan Pondok Berhad (PPPB) or Pondok Development Center Private Limited. PPPB was registered in 1995 as a private limited company. One of the objectives of the company is to promote and to strengthen the *pondok* educational system through self-sustaining financial assistance. Kelantan's *pondok* system is an illustration of a successful organizational reformation (Haji Adam Abdullah, Interview 18 February 2006). It shows that because demands to enter a *pondok* have been dwindling, the remaining *pondoks* have to find alternatives by venturing into business to ensure the survival of this type of educational system. By combining individual *pondoks* into a consortium, they could pull their strength together by sharing resources and by modernizing the system without changing the traditional and conventional aspects of the teaching pedagogy and methodology.

Curriculum Development in the Islamic School System

Questions however remain whether the religious curriculum contributes to the rise of religious zealotry among *madrasah*, *pondok* or SAR graduates. To what extent do educational methodology

and the curriculum of these types of religious education contribute to the development of radicalism and religious intolerance in Malaysia?

As mentioned earlier, only three states i.e. Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor, offer systematic Islamic education at the elementary level. Nonetheless, only Selangor and Johor conduct state-wide examination. Johor offers a Peperiksaan Kelas Khas Agama (Special Religious Class Examination) at Year Seven. Those who pass this examination are qualified to apply for religious teaching posts in the state once they have obtained their high school diploma. Negeri Sembilan, however, is quite new in the religious educational system. Hence, it does not offer any comprehensive religious examination to students. The state's main objective is merely to provide basic Islamic knowledge to elementary and to some extent high school students.

Selangor, like Johor, also offers comprehensive religious education from elementary to tertiary level. The Jabatan Aga⁵ma Islam Selangor (Selangor's Department of Religion) or better known as JAIS coordinates all Islamic schools statewide. The Curriculum of JAIS schools concentrate on Arabic language, Quranic citation, Fiqh, Sirah, and Islamic and Quranic calligraphic.

What is interesting however is that private Islamic elementary schools have to follow the JAIS curriculum. Nonetheless, these schools were given the freedom to structure and to add subjects deemed appropriate with the objectives and aspiration of the school. The Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia), for instance, does run 'elementary Islamic schools in various parts of the state. The structure of ABIM's school curriculum is similar to that of the state's, but, different emphasizes have been given on certain subjects for example Quranic ones. Rather than treating Quranic citation as a single subject like in JAIS schools, ABIM Islamic schools divides the subject into three sub-subjects –Hafazan (Tahfiz); Tafsir and Hadith. At the same subjects on Fiqh, Tawhid and Sirah are combined under the title Islamic Foundation.

The ABIM school system also offers its own statewide comprehensive examination known as SPRA (Sijil Penilaian Rendah Agama) or Certificate of Elementary Religious Examination, at Year Five which covers the above mentioned subjects. This exam is in addition to JAIS's PSRA (Peperiksaan Sekolah Rendah Agama) or an Islamic Elementary School Examination, which students from JAIS and private schools have to take.

The high school system starts from year 7 to 11 in Malaysia. It is divided into two levels, junior-highs from year 7-9, and senior-highs from year 10-11. At year 9, the students' academic performance is accessed through a national examination called Penilaian Menengah Rendah or Junior High Assessment Examination or PMR. Based on the PMR results, students would be placed either in the science, social science and arts, or business and accounting stream from year 10-11. Yet some students may opt for the Islamic religious school system, which offers secular as well as Islamic based subjects.

The subjects offered at the high school level in all state supported, partially supported, or private Islamic schools is similar to that of the national type schools except on religious subjects. At the junior-high school level, students have to take subjects including Bahasa Melayu, English, Mathematics, Science, History, Physical and Human Geography, Living Skills, and Islamic Education. Unlike the national type schools, however, students at religious type schools also have to take the extra subjects such as al-Quran, Arabic, and Communication Arabic. At the senior-high school level, students in Islamic schools have to sit a comprehensive examination namely the Sijil Menengah Agama Examination (SMA), which is equivalent to O-level in the British educational system.

Individual schools may decide themselves that subjects they offer. Compared to the secular school system, the subject offered at the Islamic school system are many and extensive. Some schools specialize on social sciences and humanities subjects while others offer science and technology subjects. At the Sekolah Agama Menengah Harapan, a privately funded Islamic school in Jenjarum, Selangor, Year 10 students have to take Arabic 1 (Nahu & Sorof), Arabic 2 (Mutalaah & Insyah), Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Tawhid, Tajwid, and al-Quran. At Year 11, they also have to study Bahasa Melayu, English, Arabic Communication, Advanced Arabic, Mathematics, Science, History, Commerce, Islamic Syariah, Quranic Education, al-Quran and Sunnah, Islamic Education and Accounting

The Sekolah Menengah Agama Tinggi Hisamuddin, one of the oldest and famous state-supported religious schools in Selangor, for instance, offers science-based subjects such as Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Economy, Accounting, Calculus, and Mathematics in addition to other subjects such as Bahasa Melayu, English and religious related subjects such as Islamic Syariah Education, Arabic, Communication Arabic, Quranic Sunnah, Syariah and Usuluddin.

The curriculum at the *pondok* system, however, is largely self-developed. The *pondok* system in Malaysia continues to guard its

traditional way of transmitting knowledge. As mentioned earlier, since the the *pondok* system in Malaysia was influenced by *tuan guru* from either neighboring southern Thailand, northern Sumatra or Java, reference books known as *kitab* were mostly written by well-known religious teachers from those sama areas. The books are known as *Kitab Kuning* (Yellow Books). *Kitab Kuning* contain comprehensive elements of Islamic teachings, covering Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Tawhid (A study of faith), Hadith (Prophet's sayings), Arabic Grammar, and Tafsir (Interpretation). Among the popular books on Arabic grammar are *Kitab Sarh Ibn Aqil 'ala Alfiyah*, *Nahw and Sarf*, and *Matn al Ajurumiyah*. As for the Islamic jurisprudence subjects, textbooks such as *Qalyubi wa Umayrah* and *Al Asbah wa al Naza'ir fi Qawa'id wa Furu' Fiqh al shafi'i* are widely used (see also Nabir Abdullah 1976:292-293 and Hasan Madmarn 1999:23-32).

At the same time, many *pondoks* in the northern part of peninsular Malaysia use *kitab* written by ulama from southern Thailand, especially from Pattani. They use the same books, for instance, *Matn Arba'in* (hadith), *Sirojul Huda* (Civic), *Aqidatun Naajim* (Tawhid), *Syarhul 'Asmawi* (fiqh and tawhid), *Penawar bagi Hari* (Tasawuf), due to the close links these *pondok* historically have, as mentioned and discussed before (Hasan Madmarn 1999).

Interpreting the role of Islamic Educational System in the Expansion of Radical Ideas

From the above discussion becomes clear that it can argued that except in the *pondok* system, students who graduate from SARs and *madrasahs* have been exposed to, and are well equipped with secular and advanced Islamic education. Therefore, it appears that the religious curriculum in the partially and state funded Islamic schools system in Malaysia has not directly contributed to the rise of radical ideas. In fact, the alumni from the Islamic school system are flexible due the fact that they received both religious and secular education. Students from the Islamic school system could opt to continue their tertiary education in Islamic studies locally or abroad. Many universities in Malaysia such as the National University of Malaysia (UKM), University of Malaya (UM), International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) and Science University of Malaysia (USM) offer Islamic studies. At the same time, these students could also choose professional or secular tertiary education such as Engineering, Accounting, Political Science, or International Relations.

One question begs to be answered; can the unstructured curriculum of the *pondok* system contribute to radicalism in Malaysia since it is not controlled by the authorities? Furthermore, *tuan gurus* in the *pondok* system can also teach and preach beyond the contents of *kitab* they use. There are two probabilities arising from these questions. It can be argued that the *halaqah* method of teaching in the *pondok* system produces anomaly in the intellectual development of the students. Students are not allowed to ask questions or to challenge the teachings of the *tuan guru*'s. Through this one-way communication, students accept knowledge as it is and hence believe whatever is taught as black and white in Islam (Mohd Afandi Salleh, Interview 11 February 2006). The implication of this type of teaching methodology is the blind acceptance of knowledge.

But the *halaqah* method alone cannot be blamed. Most of Jemaah Islamiyah followers apprehended in Malaysia were either former students or teaching staff at state-funded as well as privately owned Islamic schools such as SARs and *madrasahs*. It can be argued that some *ustaz* in this type of school used their transformational leadership style to influence their students' mindset by using their teaching opportunity to instill their political beliefs among the students. It should be noted that the major criticism against the Malaysian educational system concerns its exam-oriented method. Teaching communication is considered one way since students prefer not to ask questions and are more interested to know what would be covered in the examination. Teachers with ulterior motives would take the advantage by linking the subjects they teach with contemporary issues pertaining to Muslim plights. At the same time, teachers who are also active in extra curriculum activities would use the opportunity to deliver "sermons" to student about injustices against Muslims and government political inability. Most of them used their experience overseas by either joining Mujahidin resistance against the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan or obtained religious education from pro al-Qaeda *madrasahs* or *pondoks* to motivate students and to raise needless hatred against western governments. Once these teachers were able to influence selected students' minds and perceptions, the students would be invited to join so-called Islamic movements to expand their horizons and beliefs without knowing that they had in fact become part of a Jemaah Islamiyah's cell of networking in the region.

The role of politically inclined *tuan gurus* and their assistants could also explain how students could be exposed to radical ideas

and thinking in the religious educational environment. *Ustazs* use this opportunity to brainwash and to influence their student for personal mileage (Mohd Afandi Salleh, Interview 11 February 2006). Students would become entrenched with *tuan gurus* and their associates' passionate calls for jihad in this "injustice world". An example of this argument is Mohd Amin Razali. Mohd Amin was the leader al-Maunah, a militant group that was blamed for the Bukit Jenalik Incident. In the incident, Mohd Amin led an attempted coup by staging an armed heist and by kidnapping several security officers. It was argued that his character and political inclination were largely influenced by his exposure to radical religious ideas and concepts while he was studying at the Madrasah Misbah Al-Falah Lanai, Baling Kedah, a state in the northeast of peninsular Malaysia (*Massa* 15-21 July 2000: 16). The *madrasah* was well-known for its political inclination towards the PAS. Mohd Amin was said to be attracted by the story of Ibrahim Libya who was killed during a clash between the government law enforcers and PAS followers in the Memali incident. He continued to mesmerize his audience with the incident whenever he delivered his religious sermons in PAS-supported *madrasahs* and SARs (*Utusan Malaysia* 6 April 2001)

What is even more interesting to analyze is how graduates from the Islamic educational system adapted to the multicultural and multi-religious society of Malaysia. It can be argued that students in the Islamic educational system are not exposed to the reality of Malaysian society since the school or *madrasah* population is dominated by Malay-Muslim students. The school system might create *'alim* (learned people) with a religious and secular educational background, yet the question is whether the school system is able to produce accommodative and liberal students. Inadequate exposure to the Malaysia's multicultural society might create students with a religious background with a parochial way of thinking and with an inferiority complex and, unable to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Mohd Afandi Salleh, Interview 11 February 2006).

It has also been widely debated in Malaysia that the local educational system fails to integrate society. The Chinese community in particular inclines to send their children to a Chinese language school since the federal's national school is perceived to be too Islamic in the orientation of its teaching. As a result, the majority of the student population at the Malaysian national schools is Malay. Malay-Muslim families, furthermore, begin to send their children

to the Islamic based schools. The growing middle class in Malaysia has also made it possible for Malay-Muslim families to send their children to private Islamic schools and *madrasahs*. The school attracts the attention particularly of religious-conscious families that have little quality time to spend with their children. As a result, Malaysia's future generation might be compartmentalized into different strata of society due to diverse educational backgrounds. This kind of scenario is highly dangerous to the societal and cultural development of the country since it might create a generation with an attitude of indifference generation, might create a phenomenon of cultural and religious hatred, and lead to an environment of political instability.

Conclusion

Critics might argue that religion can be a potent weapon to mobilize and unite people, and it has been used and misused in this way throughout human history. However, religious militancy does not arise in a vacuum. There must be reasons why people decide to resort to violent behavior to protect what they believe. This article is part of a research project trying to look at the role and function of Islamic education in Malaysian society. There was an assumption that Islamic education produced a very parochial trait of inward looking students who only are interested in the Hereafter. Furthermore, there was the argument that the curriculum used in the Islamic educational system could become a potent source of religious radicalism in Malaysia and in the region.

Yet this article argues otherwise. Islamic schools are neither a source of threats nor contribute to the expansion of radicalism, at least in Malaysia. This is because the religious curriculum offered either by the state funded or privately funded religious schools is well structured and controlled by the government. In fact, Malaysia is promoting an Islamic school system that integrates religious and secular education. Students are exposed not only to professional cum secular subjects but at the same time are taught religious subjects to enrich their spiritual knowledge. At the elementary and high school levels, this type of educational system has been introduced since thirty years ago. The setting up of the International Islamic University (IIUM) and various other Islamic University colleges are manifestations of the government's commitment to integrate Islamic and secular knowledge. So far the experiment has succeeded in pro-

ducing professionals with religious knowledge. Nonetheless, this article is also concerned with the role of *tuan guru* or *ustazs* who have ulterior motives that could influence students' perceptions and mindset about the world. The role and leadership of teachers, then, has to be continuously checked so that they will not become a torn in the flesh in the Malaysian Islamic educational system.

Endnotes

- * This article is based on research funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). The project's anthro-sociological approach brought author to various parts of Malaysia and southern Thailand to investigate the particularities of the curriculums and the *madrasah* and *pondok* school systems' social contribution. The author is immensely grateful to the students and teachers of the *madrasahs* and *pondoks* as well as to individuals who directly or indirectly helped the author to finish this project.
1. This is based on interview conducted for this research project with students, parents, and teachers from various Islamic schools.
 2. Since the introduction of the New Economic Policy, rural students who scored high marks at the Year Five National Comprehensive Examination were sent to federal funded science based boarding high schools. The emphasis on the science subjects was in line with the government policy to produce professionals in hard and applied sciences such as engineering and medicine.
 3. It is very interesting to note that although it was an individual state's religious council that gave the annual grants to these independent Islamic schools or SARs, the money was provided through the federal government's assistance to the individual state
 4. The Mahathir administration was accused of neglecting and politically discriminating the *pondok* system. The administration believed that the *pondoks* as well as privately funded *madrasahs* were the venues for anti government activities. Yet the current Abdullah Badawi administration tends to distance itself from the earlier policy by giving more assistance to *pondok* and *madrasah* schools (*Metro Ahad* 17 February 2008)
 5. Islamic education at the elementary level is offered after the school hours of Federal schools, whereas, Islamic high school system is offered full time. Since five years, the Selangor state also offers the Islamic educational system at the tertiary level through the International Islamic University College Selangor (KUIAS)
 6. ABIM is a non-governmental and Islamic youth based organization that was established in 1972 by the leaders of a student movement led by Anwar Ibrahim. The main objective of the movement is to bring major legal, political, societal and economic reforms in the Malaysian society. As a political movement, ABIM has called for more transparency, justice, and accountability in the Malaysian political system. For more discussion of the history and development of the movement, please refer to Kamarulnizam Abdullah (2003), Zainah Anwar (1987), Nagata (1980, 1984) and Muhammad Nur Manuty (1989).
 7. The information on history, school and student activities, and subjects offered can be accessed through the school official website at <http://www.geocities.com/samth00/>
 8. According to transformational leadership theory, people will follow a person (leader) who inspires them. Transformational leadership starts with the development of a vision, a view of the future that will excite and convert potential followers. This vision may be developed by the leader, by the senior team or may emerge from a broad series of discussions. The next step, which in fact never stops, is constantly to sell the vision. This

takes energy and commitment, as few people will immediately buy into a radical vision, and some will join the show much more slowly than others will. The transformational leader thus takes every opportunity and will use whatever works to convince others to climb on board the bandwagon. Please see Bass, B.M. *Leadership and performance beyond expectation*. New York: Free Press, 1985; Bass, B.M. 'From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision'. *Organizational Dynamics*, (winter 1990): 19-31. ; and Burns, J.M. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

9. For more discussion on the issue, please see Kamarulnizam Abdullah 2001. "Limiting the threats of Ideological-based Terror Groups: Lessons to be Learned from Malaysia?" In *Nuclear War and Planetary emergencies 31st Session: The Cultural Planetary Emergency: Focus on Terrorism*, edited by R. Ragaini. New Jersey, London, Singapore etc.

References

ABIM Curriculum Book, not dated

Bass, B.M. 1990. From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, (winter): 19-31.

_____, 1985. *Leadership and performance beyond expectation*. New York: Free Press.

Berita Harian 2 February 2008

Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row

Firdaus Abdullah. 1985. *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications

Haji Abdul Rahman, Interview, Kuala Terengganu, 10 February 2006.

Haji Adam Abdullah, Interview, Kota Bahru 18 February 2006.

Metro Ahad 17 February 2008

Hassan Madmarn. 2002. *The Pondok & Madrasah in Patani*. Bangi: Penerbit UKM.

Kamarulnizam Abdullah. 2003. *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*. Bangi. Penerbit UKM.

_____, 2001. "Limiting the threats of Ideological-based Terror Groups: Lessons to be Learned from Malaysia?" In *Nuclear War and Planetary emergencies 31st Session: The Cultural Planetary Emergency: Focus on Terrorism*, edited by R. Ragaini. New Jersey, London, Singapore at. al.: World Scientific

Massa 15-21 July 2000

Mohd Afandi Salleh, Lecturer at the Universiti Darul Imam Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu, 11 February 2006

Muhammad Nur Manuty. 1989. *Perception of Social Change in Contemporary Malaysia: A Critical Analysis of ABIM's Role and its Impact Among Muslim Youth*. Ph.D. (unpub.) Temple University.

Nabir, Abdullah. 1976. *Maahad Il Ihya Assariff Gunung Semanggol 1934-1959*. Bangi: Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Nagata, J. 1984. *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

_____. 1980. "The New Fundamentalism: Islam in Contemporary Malaysia." *Asia Thought & Society*. V (14): 128-41.

Pitsuwan, Surin. 1989. *Islam di MuangThai: Nasionalisme Melayu Masyarakat Patani (Islam in Southern Thailand: Patani Society's Malay Nationalism)*, Forwarded by M Dawam Rahardjo. Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial

Sekolah Agama Menengah Tinggi Hisamuddin at <http://www.geocities.com/samth00/> (accessed on 23 November 2007)

Utusan Malaysia 25 October 2002

Utusan Malaysia, 6 April 2001

Zainah Anwar. 1987. *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among Students*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.

Mohd Kamarulnizam Abdullah is Associate Professor and Head at the Strategic Studies and International Relations Program, School of History, Politics, and Strategic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. His major research and writings concentrate on the security implications of political and militant Islam in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. He has published numerous articles in books and journals concerning the issue