Khoo Boo Teik

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Southeast Asia Research Centre
The City University of Hong Kong
83 Tat Chee Avenue
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Tel: (852) 2194 2352
Fax: (852) 2194 2353
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SEARCHING FOR ISLAM IN MALAYSIAN POLITICS: CONFLUENCES, DIVISIONS AND GOVERNANCE*

Khoo Boo Teik
School of Social Sciences
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Penang, Malaysia
booteik@usm.my

Islam has been widely assumed to occupy a growing, if not central, position in Malaysian politics since the advent of an Islamic resurgence, revivalism or reflowering in the 1970s that was marked by the emergence of many non-governmental Islamic organisations and *dakwah* movements. The above assumption, and its many consequent analyses of a rising, perhaps even threatening, 'political Islam' seemed justified, if belatedly, by the results of the November 1999 general election. Then, the leading component of the opposition Barisan Alternatif (BA, or Alternative Front), that is, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS, or Islamic Party), gained an additional twenty seats in Parliament, retained the state government of Kelantan and wrested control of the state of Trengganu from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the dominant party of Barisan Nasional (BN, or the National Front), the ruling coalition.

In the wake of 'September 11' and the US-led 'war on terror' – a war of terror against radical Muslims, recalcitrant Muslim states and virtually Islam itself – Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose own policies of Islamisation were never regarded as any but 'secularist', declared that Malaysia was already an 'Islamic state'. Ahead of the 2004 general election, however, PAS released its own *Islamic State Document*, a programmatic statement that confirmed for

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many the party's 'fundamentalist', theocratic or 'radical' intents that included 'using democracy to destroy democracy'.[1] Even PAS's considerable setbacks in the March 2004 general election seemed not to dislodge the notion of an inexorable Islamisation of Malaysian politics because, it has been suggested by politicians and observers, the new Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's proferring of a 'moderate and progressive' 'Islam Hadhari' was much more persuasive.

Of course, long before these developments, Islam had been present in Malay(si)an politics. Islam underpinned the rule of the *ancien regime* in each of the Malay states. During colonial times, by treaties made between the Malay rulers and the British crown, Islam was specifically demarcated as an administrative area (besides 'native customs') in which ran the writ of the traditional Malay ruler who was otherwise subject to the 'advice' of British Residents. Some of the early Malay nationalist movements were informed and inspired by Islamic reformism. The Constitution of the independent and recognisably multireligious and multiethnic Federation of Malaya maintained Islam as the 'official religion' of the country and as a fundamental parameter for the legal definition of a 'Malay'. As an ideological weapon, Islam was deployed against the 'atheism' of the Communist Party of Malaya during the Emergency. As a matter of fact, it was the breakaway religious bureau of UMNO that formed the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS by its old English name) in 1951.[2] In subsequent periods, but before the Islamic resurgence, the UMNO-led regimes implemented many policies and programmes that were consonant with maintaining Islam's privileged status vis-à-vis all other religions in the country.

Against this background, the main title of this essay may seem to be coy. It is not meant to be so. Let me first illustrate with some observations gained from my visit, in late May, 2004, to Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu, respectively the capitals of Kelantan and Trengganu, the only states to have been ruled at various times by an avowedly Islamic political party (PAS).

In Kota Bharu, a senior researcher of Pusat Kajian Strategik (Centre for Strategic Studies), the 'think tank' of the PAS government of Kelantan, said to me that, 'In 1990, we had S46. In 1999, Anwar Ibrahim. This time, in 2004, there was the Ibrahim Ali factor.'[3]

The Pusat Kajian Strategik researcher was recalling that in *1990*, after being thirteen years out of government, PAS had swept back to power in Kelantan in coalition with Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46, or The Spirit of 46 Malay Party), the latter being a party of UMNO dissidents who had been forced out of UMNO

[1] As Mahathir Mohamad (2002) put it, 'The dilemma that the Malays and the Malaysian people face is whether we should, in the name of democracy, allow the country to be destroyed or we ensure that people are not subjected to manipulations to the point where they will use democracy to destroy democracy.'

[2] See Mohd. Amin (2001) for the first part of what is effectively an official history of PAS. Funston (1980: 87–94) provides a longer and balanced view of PAS's origins as a major Malay political party.

[3] Conversation with A. Shukor Tahir, Kota Bharu, 22 May 2004.

following the turmoil of the party's elections in 1987. In *1999*, another crisis in UMNO, revolving around the dismissal and persecution of Anwar Ibrahim, directly helped PAS to retain control of Kelantan, this time as the leading member of an opposition coalition, Barisan Alternatif (BA, or Alternative Front). The March *2004* general election permitted PAS to rule on its own but only just, since PAS had a very slim victory over a resurgent UMNO. In this most recent election, Ibrahim Ali, who had been dropped from the Kelantan UMNO leadership and was not nominated by UMNO, chose to 'sabotage' the UMNO campaign.[4] Ibrahim contested the parliamentary constituency of Pasir Mas as an 'independent' candidate and secured 6,198 votes; that is, he critically diverted a large number of votes from UMNO, thus handing the PAS candidate a 1,251-vote victory. In the more crucial three state-level contests within Pasir Mas, Ibrahim's 'sabotage' cost UMNO dearly: UMNO lost the Pengkalan Pasir seat by 55 votes and the Chetok seat by 512 votes.

In Kuala Trengganu, a taxi driver, by his narrative and tone an UMNO man, or at least someone hostile to PAS and sympathetic towards UMNO,[5] said:

> Last election (1999), Wan Mokhtar was very unpopular. Trengganu people didn't benefit much: *royalti tanpa pembangunan* ([petroleum] royalty without development). Mahathir was *zalim* (cruel), and public anger over Anwar's *aib* (humiliation) was high. Everywhere in Trengganu, people said, '*Ubah sekali*!' (Change completely!)
>
> This election (2004) … no Wan Mokhtar, no Mahathir, no Anwar. But there was Pak Lah [Abdullah Ahmad Badawi]. So, people said, 'Give BN a chance.'

The taxi driver was recounting the core differences between the two elections in Trengganu that caused UMNO/BN to be toppled from power in 1999 and PAS to be defeated in 2004 respectively.

Neither of the above two accounts of PAS's electoral performances can be taken at face value to represent the complexities of politics in Kelantan or Trengganu. But the accounts from these opposing sides of the UMNO-PAS divide converge in one respect: they stress the decisive impact of suddenly altered circumstances, including the coming and going of specific personalities, that had caused PAS's severe declines in Kelantan and Trengganu in 2004. By these two accounts, however, what part, if any, did religion, that is, Islam, play

[4] In his political career, which included two detentions under the Internal Security Act, Ibrahim Ali went from ABIM to Berjasa (late 1970s), and then to UMNO (1981); after that he followed Tengku Razaleigh into S46 (1989) before returning to UMNO to become a diehard Mahathir loyalist. This record of party-hopping gained Ibrahim the unkind nickname of *Al-Kataki* – hence, 'Ibrahim the Frog' – even before he turned 'independent' in 2004.

[5] For example, he spoke bitterly of relatives and neighbours harassing him when he objected to the raising of PAS banners and posters outside his house ahead of the 2004 election, but expectantly of 'development' – always a code for preferring an UMNO/BN government.

in electoral outcomes that are often regarded as measures of the intensification of Islamic politics?

The researcher, who made his remarks about S46, Anwar Ibrahim and Ibrahim Ali had done so half flippantly. But, then, he had added: 'Kelantan is special. As if God looks after Kelantan and PAS.'[6] In his addendum was not a mere sense of relief which is at once comprehensible because PAS was reduced to having 24 seats to UMNO's 21 in the Kelantan State Legislative Assembly. There was almost a note of wonderment as if religion entered the equation and came to PAS's rescue *somehow*.

Exactly 'how' is the question. It is a critical question now that the run of political commentary on 'Islam and politics' has decidedly turned towards a stark, not to say fearful, depiction of the major political parties as being pitted in an urgent contest between moderate and extremist, progressive and fundamentalist, and 'secular' and theocratic Islam. Perhaps precisely when dominant discourses and analyses fasten upon Islam and Malaysian politics in the near hysterical fashion of post-September 11 constructions of the world of Islam – one needs seriously to ask: *where is Islam in Malaysian politics*?

This essay provides an incomplete and tentative answer, but one that explores Islam as it is 'found' in politics, the economy and social policies, with special reference to PAS, and in regard to its administration of Kelantan (and somewhat less so, of Trengganu).

I. An idiom from two movements

In the general election of 1959, the first to be held after independence, PAS practically leapt from nowhere to ruling the two states of Kelantan and Trengganu, and staking a big claim on the allegiance of the Malay-Muslim electorate. PAS's startling success occasioned many sceptical and prejudiced academic responses largely coloured by one or another variant of modern-isation theory and an empathy with the ruling Alliance coalition. As a political party, PAS was then regarded as being extremist, less so in an Islamic as a 'Malay chauvinist' mould. Its leaders, many of whom were (non-English educated) religious teachers, were cast as traditionalists, fanatics and sometimes even charlatans. They were judged to have appealed demagogically to the poorly educated, communalistic and parochial masses populating Malaya's economically and socially backward regions.

This summary of standard academic conceptions of PAS and scholarly attitudes towards the party and its supporters up to the 1969 general election is not a caricature. Clive Kessler amply surveyed and critiqued them as part of his pioneering work on the social origins of PAS, located within Kelantan's historical specificities (Kessler 1978: 32-33). As Kessler himself expressed it, his own study

[6] Conversation with A. Shukor Tahir, Kota Bharu, 22 May 2004.

> traces the origins of the PMIP in Kelantan … [in] the particular circumstances of Malay political development in Kelantan during the colonial period and details the manner in which national politics were subsequently woven, through the rivalries of contending Kelantanese elites, into the social fabric of a distinctive Malay state. It shows how, under modern conditions of competitive party politics, new commoner elites, working through the PMIP, succeeded in mobilizing the peasantry against the state's leading princely and aristocratic families whose political ascendancy under colonial rule had been built upon the administration of Islam. It thus shows the PMIP to be the product of enduring tensions within Kelantan's predominantly Malay society, and suggests that the party expressed class antagonisms among Malays rather than the ethnic antagonism between Malays and Chinese. It further indicates how the PMIP mobilized support, not through the allegedly otherworldly power of illicitly invoked religious slogans, but by employing Islam as a politically persuasive idiom for the apprehension of mundane social experience. … Rather than being a manifestation of religious fanaticism, Malay racialism, and peasant traditionalism, the PMIP served as a religiously informed popular movement for the defense of peasant interests (Kessler 1978: 35).

Kessler concluded that PAS represented, 'like many populist movements … a *conservative movement of radical discontent*' whose typical supporter belonged to a 'threatened smallholder peasantry' who in 'seeking the restoration of an idealized past … is gradually radicalized by his forlorn attempt to remain traditional' (Kessler 1978: 167).[7]

In fact, neither the social restoration nor the political radicalisation noted by Kessler came to pass. This was partly because PAS ceased to be an opposition party for several years when it joined the BN, the enlarged ruling coalition that replaced the Alliance after the interethnic violence of 13 May 1969. Partly it was because the implementation of the NEP managed to contain rural discontent in at least three different ways. First, the settlement of landless peasants in the land schemes managed by the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda)

[7] It is instructive to note Kessler's conclusion at length: 'Rooted in the grievances of a threatened smallholder peasantry, the PMIP, like many populist movements, is a *conservative movement of radical discontent*. This ambiguity stems from the paradoxical interests and aspirations of its main supporters who, as peasant smallholders wholly or in part, call for the restoration of the peasant social order. Dissatisfied with the present and apprehensive concerning the future, they invoke an idealised past, remaining, no less than Kelantan's colonial administrators, captives of the elusive vision of a sturdy yeoman peasantry. While their social relations remain encased within the traditional mold, the smallholders are the group most vulnerable to the intrusion of outside economic forces. These culturally conservative bearers of the peasant tradition are initially the most disaffected and militant, though not the most radical, among the peasantry. Seeking the restoration of an idealised past, the smallholder is gradually radicalised by his forlorn attempt to remain traditional.' (Kessler 1978: 167).

assuaged to some extent an economically vulnerable rural populace's poverty and 'hunger for land' (Husin Ali 1978). Second, the NEP inducted large sections of the young rural population into the new export-processing zones in which multinational corporations commenced a programme of export-oriented industrialisation. Third, the state sent tens of thousands of young Malay students into educational institutions at home and abroad, and created employment and business opportunties for other Malays. Broadly, this would seem to be no milieu to favour the vitality of Islam as a 'politically persuasive idiom'.

Indeed the revitalisation of Islam as political discourse did not come directly from PAS, but rather a 'global Islamic resurgence' that touched the lives of Malaysian Muslims at home and abroad. The global Islamic resurgence was never monolithic. In political terms alone, the resurgence encompassed a bewildering range of militant movements in the Middle East, churned as it was by war, imperialist interventions in the affairs of the *ummah* and revolution. But to the extent that it bespoke 'a symptom of a development crisis', 'primarily … the failure to overcome problems associated with uneven and skewed development', the resurgence attracted 'the young, the "new middle class" of professionals, technocrats and students of non-religious subjects, and the urban dispossessed' – 'groups [that] have their own reasons to bear a grudge against the state for its failure to deliver economic dividends in the wake of urbanisation and education'. And inasmuch as the resurgence was 'a manifestation of Muslim reaction against a universal crisis of modernity'(Ahmad Fauzi: 2001: 23), 'what Islamists oppose is not Western-inspired modernisation per se, but rather the accompanying social ills such as break-up of family life, individualistic and materialistic attitudes to life, widespread divorce, sexual freedom, crime and immorality in general' (Ahmad Fauzi 2001: 24).[8] In short, the resurgence tended to be radical in its political opposition to the state in many Muslim countries, but conservative in its espousal of 'religion as a doctrinaire remoulder of society' (Thubron, 1995: 42).

On the campuses of Malaysian universities, the Islamic resurgence showed itself in *dakwah* activism among Muslim students, most visibly via the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, of Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) and the Jamaah Islah Malaysia. In some universities in the UK and the USA, Muslim activists among the large number of government-sponsored Malaysian students founded organisations such as the Islamic Representative Council, Malaysian Islamic Study Group and Suara Islam (Zainah 1987: 25–30). In time, the domestic and 'foreign' organisations developed links with Islamists in both the 'core' and the 'periphery' of the world of Islam, from Egypt to Pakistan, for

[8] Whereas Ahmad Fauzi (2001: 24) types this 'response to post-colonial modernisation [as being] pragmatic rather than reactionary: one of eclecticism rather than outright rejection', Bashiriyeh (2004: 97) suggests that 'Fundamentalists may and indeed do accept the instrumental and technological aspects of modernity but reject its ideological and cutlural dimensions. They want the body without the soul, so to speak.' In the history of the 'modernisation' of the non-west, this 'problem' predates and is not peculiar to the Islamic resurgence.

example. Besides student-based *dakwah* organisations, there were other expressions of the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. The Darul Arqam, notably, began in the 1970s to build an almost self-contained and self-reliant Islamic community, complete with its own economic, educational and social institutions. The state Islamised itself to some extent, its most visible policies being Mahathir Mohamad's broad programme of 'Islamisation'.

For the Malaysian Islamists, the period of the NEP was not a time of personal privation; quite the contrary because of the NEP.[9] If they experienced a 'crisis of development', it was not that of underdevelopment, but the multidimensional outcome of rapid and far-reaching development. They were witness to the socially and culturally destabilising and dislocating changes that accompanied the capitalist transformation of Malay-Muslim society, partly led by the state and partly advanced by the multinational corporations. Nor were the Islamists subjected to political upheaval or ravage in Malaysia even though they came under wary state scrutiny and bouts of police repression. But looking at the global *ummah*, the Islamists were conscious of its terrible conditions. Like Islamists elsewhere, they spurned the idea that the solutions to domestic and global problems could be supplied by capitalism or communism, each of which had intervened with disastrous consequences in the Middle East. Nor would they turn to nationalism that had frequently failed, or to 'secularism' that was often imposed by force. Hence, although 'for Islamists, it would be extremely offensive to attribute their "discovery" of the Islamic message to other causes which suggest "escapist" explanations and misuse of Islam as a political tool' (Ahmad Fauzi 2001: 29), the Malaysian Islamists discovered in Islam an undivided fount of religious identity, personal piety, social consciousness, and political engagement. Or, as Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, the Mentri Besar of Kelantan since 1990 often says, 'Politics for us didn't begin when the west invented socialism, capitalism or pragmatism. It began with Islam. Therefore, when we have problems, we don't turn to socialism, capitalism or pragmatism. We return to Islam for our solutions.'[10]

Crucially in Malaysia, the call among Islamists of different orientations for a 'return to Islam', to its observance and practice as *ad-Din* (a complete 'way of life'), occurred amidst the turmoil that beset PAS from 1977 to 1982. In 1977, a split in the PAS-led government of Kelantan, abetted by UMNO's intervention, led to PAS's withdrawal from the BN, the declaration of a state of emergency in Kelantan and PAS's heavy defeat in the 1978 general election. Bereft of any regional power base and discredited by its counter-productive sojourn in BN, the PAS leadership (then under Mohamad Asri) was toppled by a group of *ulama*, old and young, many of whom had furthered their religious education in the Middle-East (but also elsewhere at times). PAS's new *ulama* leadership,

[9] 'But for these Malays – like many middle classes elsewhere who no longer have to scramble for subsistence but who prioritise rights and social justice instead – Islam is the metaphor for their aspirations for a more ethical society and for their ensuing disgruntlement.' (Martinez 2004: 38).

[10] As he said when he spoke at the *Seminar Politik Kelantan*, Kota Bharu, 23 May 2004. This excerpt was noted and translated by the author who was present at the seminar.

comprising men like Yusof Rawa, Fadzil Mohd. Noor, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Abdul Hadi Awang, represented a conjunction of the older, local 'conservative movement of radical discontent' with the new, global *radical movement of conservative discontent*.[11]

Thus was Islam revitalised 'for the apprehension of everyday life' but under conditions that required doctrinal reinvention by Islamists in general and PAS in particular. Social life had been much altered by the state's pursuit of a nationalist-capitalist project, beginning with the NEP and continuing with Mahathir's 'Malaysia Incorporated'. Two decades of consistently high economic growth had produced enormous wealth but also glaring inequalities – within rural society, between rural and urban communities and between new politico-corporate elites and the rest of society. For instance, Kelantan, the poorest state in Malaysia, was not just economically divided from the Klang Valley, the richest region. The capitalist, corporate and consumerist world of metropolitan Kuala Lumpur was unimaginably remote from the communitarian environments of rural and small-town Kelantan.[12] For that matter, appeals to ethnic commonality, expressed in 'Malay nationalism' vis-à-vis the non-Malays, could scarcely bridge the gulf between the spectacularly rich 'Melayu Baru' of the major cities and the rural poor of the so-called 'Malay heartland'. From the perspective of those who held to Islam as *ad-Din*, the former were also corrupt and and not coincidentally unIslamic.

At least until the early 1990s, Malaysian politics was subject to the intensification of interethnic disputes, over NEP implementation, opportunities for small businesses, culture, language and education. Given the residential and cultural patterns of Malaysian society, the 'relationship' between the Islamists and PAS leaders, and the non-Malays, especially the Chinese was characterised by distance, mutual incomprehension and unease. Yet, those who were part of the global Islamic resurgence could find little purchase on 'Malayness'. UMNO had practically monopolised that marker of identity as a political rallying point. Besides, the 'Malay nationalism' of the Asri leadership was jettisoned by the new *ulama* leaders who lived and throve in social environments distant from the majority of the non-Muslim communities.[13]

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[11] To invert Kessler's formulation. Note that Muhammad Ikmal (1996: 61) called this ideological turn of PAS's 'conservative (that is, puritanical) radicalism'.

[12] As an example, the changing social relations in Kota Bharu under an incipient capitalism in the mid-1970s (Halim 1981) were far removed from, not to say 'far behind', the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the major towns. With time, the differences were simply accentuated by the persistent 'underdevelopment' of Kelantan and the 'overdevelopment' of urban agglomerations like Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor Baru. During my recent visit to Kota Bharu, I found it almost inconceivable that some Kelantanese thought they could make do with household monthly incomes of RM500 which would consign any household in the major cities to utter poverty.

[13] Note: 'The years since the ascendancy of the new PAS leadership in 1982 have seen a curious mix of greater ideological consistency combined with strategic incoherence. Acutely aware of the Malay nationalist underpinnings of the party's espousal of Islam under Asri, the new leaders have tried to articulate a more pristine version of Islam, inadvertently surrendering Asri's turf to Mahathir, Sanusi and Anwar's "born-again" Muslim UMNO. (Jomo and Ahmad 1992: 97):

Pledging adherence to a purer universalistic Islam, various Islamists sought to dissociate themselves from ethnic divisiveness:

> 1985 also saw the beginnings of PAS's own campaign against *assabiyah*, which, in the Malaysian context, generally refers to ethnic chauvinism. Not unlike ABIM earlier, PAS denounced ethnic chauvinism in relation to its advocacy of Islam as the solution to the problems of Malaysia's plural society. However, breaking significantly with the ABIM heritage, and going well beyond Anwar's ambiguous – some even claim opportunistic – formulations, PAS leaders, notably Hadi, went on to reject ethnic discrimination and privileges, including the NEP and Bumiputraism, as inimical to the spirit of Islam (Jomo and Ahmad 1992: 98).

The above summary cannot capture the totality of an untidy mosaic of social divisions changing conditions and new waves of discontent. But by the time PAS had reinvented its political idiom to renew its challenge to UMNO:

> social life in rural areas with clear and strong opposition to the government, such as in Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis, [had been] split along party lines. While supporters of the opposition are often denied federal government (rural development) hand-outs, government agents enjoy all kinds of rural development subsidies, with their leaders also getting minor government contracts. Their positions become more entrenched as opposition to the government increases, because they constitute the first line of defence for the status quo in the rural areas. As a result, the rural structure has become more sharply defined under rural development processes, and local leaders have resisted all threats to their positions. While this makes it easy for the government to change rural development strategies whenever the need arises, dissenting voices from marginalized groups do not normally gain prominence. The latter may seek refuge in opposition politics, but opposition political parties require more than vulgar material concerns (for example, religion as used by the Parti Islam SeMalaysia – PAS) to gain wider support (Halim 1999: 191).

Old discontents found new expressions in particular localities, such as in Felda schemes. Inconclusive conflicts developed between the settlers' aspirations of land ownership and the Felda management practices that seemed to proletarianise them. In the absence of left radical movements, such conflicts were conducted by appeals to Islamic principles:

> the main opposition political party that settlers have identified with is PAS. Basically, the party advocates establishment of an Islamic way of life within an Islamic state of Malaysia. As UMNO

> had turned the country away from this path, PAS leaders denounce UMNO, its members and its policies for capitalist development as un-Islamic. Such opinions are echoed by PAS supporters in land schemes as well. For instance, they argue that they are forced into the forbidden system of usury (*riba*) as shown by payment of interest on their loan repayment by virtue of being in land schemes. Likewise, they argue that the block system provides them with a forbidden (*haram*) income because Islam forbids a follower to deprive others of their labour which is possible under the block system (Halim 1992: 116).[14]

In short, during its revivalist phase of the early 1980s,

> PAS intellectually aligned itself with contemporary trends in Islamic resurgence by repudiating nationalism of all sorts … Bent upon discarding its nationalist and traditional image, PAS revived demands for an Islamic state, remodelled its arguments with Islamic political vocabulary, resorted to universal principles of justice and equality to woo non-Muslims, and presented itself as the voice of the oppressed masses. PAS' fierce assaults against government policies criticised injustices of the New Economic Policy and oppressive legislation, shed [cast?] doubts on 'cosmetic Islamisation' and raised concern at the lack of initiatives to tackle rising problems of corruption and moral decadence (Ahmad Fauzi 2003a: 81–82).

However, persistent divisions, rejuvenated ideology and determined challenges were no guarantee of political recovery. The non-Muslim vote, despite PAS's doctrinal concessions and practical overtures in the mid-1980s, was closed to the party. The typical non-Muslim voter supported the BN's non-Malay parties or the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP). So long as interethnic disputes were unabated but NEP-driven growth benefitted a large section of the Malay population, UMNO's 'Malay nationalist' appeal, vast financial resources and powers of state held the Malay electorate against any PAS incursion. Despite the fervour that PAS leaders generated before the 1986 general election, the election result was dismal for PAS: one seat in Parliament out of 87 contests against UMNO.

As it turned out, political developments unconnected with Islam – at least that would be so to a secular analyst – brought PAS back to power in Kelantan, and subsequently in Trengganu as well. The story of 'the rise of PAS' since 1990,

[14] Moreover, Halim (1992: 117) noted, '… the threat of settlers' protests through Islam seems quite real because the fundamentalist protest ideology seems compatible with their materialist demands. The latter was expressed by a PAS lawyer in two booklets which accuse Felda of turning settlers into workers similar to coolies in colonial estates because it deprived them of their basic legal protection and welfare provisions. The booklets also criticise Felda for deducting settlers' income excessively, not providing them with secure land tenure and holding them on constant threat of expulsion.'

briefly noted in the introductory section of this essay, is too well rehearsed to bear a detailed repetition here.[15] Suffice it to explore the significance of PAS's recovery for two critical issues: the compatibility of Islam with democracy, and the meanings of Islam in administration.

II. Democracy and the electoral process

As Table 1 and Table 2, below, show, in Kelantan, and to a lesser extent, Trengganu, exists as close to a 'two-party system' as has been seen in Malaysian politics.[16]

Table 1: Governments of Kelantan, 1957-2004

Period	Party (Coalition) in power	Comment
1957-59	UMNO (Alliance)	Based on 1955 Legislative Council election
1959-74	PAS	Victory from first post-Merdeka election
1974-77	PAS (Barisan Nasional)	Ended after a PAS split abetted by UMNO
1977-78	State of Emergency	Rule by National Operations Council
1978-90	UMNO (Barisan Nasional)	With Berjasa, party of PAS breakaway
1990-96	PAS-S46	Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah coalition
1996-99	PAS	S46 was dissolved in 1996
1999-2004	PAS (Barisan Alternatif)	With Keadilan as a minor partner
Since April 2004	PAS	Nominally in coalition with Keadilan

Table 2: Governments of Trengganu, 1957-2004

Period	Party (Coalition) in power	Comment
1957-59	UMNO (Alliance)	Based on 1955 Legislative Council election
1959-61	PAS	Victory in first post-Merdeka election
1962-64	UMNO (Alliance)	Defections caused fall of PAS government
1964-99	UMNO (Alliance / BN)	Long UMNO rule
1999-2004	PAS (Barisan Alternatif)	PAS return on *Reformasi* wave
Since April 2004	UMNO (BN)	Dramatic reversal of 1999 election result

One might even call it a 'two-Malay-party system' since a major reason for this atypical situation lay in the absence of interethnic disputes in the over-whelmingly Malay Kelantan and Trengganu. As such, the electorate could choose between UMNO and PAS without worrying about a non-Malay intrusion into the local political contexts. Thus, political conflicts in Kelantan and Trengganu traditionally turned on an even UMNO-PAS divide,[17] and a small but definite voters' swing could decisively affect electoral outcomes. On the eve of

[15] Halim (2000), Khoo (2003: 145–54), Maznah (2004)
[16] Of course, changes in government at the state level had taken place in Penang (1969) and Sabah (various times) before. But after Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia joined BN in 1974, no opposition party has ruled Penang. The situation in Sabah has been more complex, with different parties assuming power, either supported by or eventually joining the Alliance or BN.
[17] Less than five per cent of Kelantan's population is non-Malay.

more than one election, internal strife in one party provided that swing by prompting the defection of its members and supporters to its rival (Halim 2000: 3).[18]

A second important reason has to be PAS's perseverance in electoral contestation despite having to endure the highly unequal terms of contest and periodic repression. Proclamations by PAS leaders of the party's commitment to democracy and the electoral process have often been met with scepticism. But PAS's record being not without substance, the views of PAS leaders such as the present PAS president, Abdul Hadi Awang, deserve a serious consideration:

> PAS definitely participates in elections and the system of democracy practised in this country.… Previously PAS won in Kelantan and Trengganu, fully accepted the fall of its governments in these two states, and continued to struggle via elections until PAS regained victory. The people can reject us if we fail (Hadi 2002: 24).[19]

Indeed, on the issue of any party's being a threat to the maintenance of democracy, Hadi was far from being disingenuous or provocative when he reminded voters not to be 'fooled and tyrannized by the media and the abuse of laws' (Hadi 2002: 49), since

> PAS patiently endured the fall of its governments in Trengganu in 1961, in Kelantan in 1978, the results of UMNO's extremist actions. In Trengganu, the fall occurred via money politics and administrative and media pressures; in Kelantan via an emergency arranged with orchestrated demonstrations. PAS firmly supports democracy by participating in elections but UMNO displays its extremist attitude and is prepared to destroy democracy if it loses because it will not patiently suffer even a reduction in votes and seats (Hadi 2002: 49).

There may be more to this PAS position than its leaders' self-proclaimed

[18] Of the 1990 election, Funston (2004: 170) said: 'PAS gains were mainly a consequence of UMNO internal divisions and weaknesses. Not only was this reflected in the formation of Semangat 46, state UMNO organisations throughout the northern rural states had become deeply factionalised and alienated from the electorate.'

[19] Compare the statement with this assessment: PAS 'in contrast with most other Islamic parties in the Muslim world, has since its inception participated in the Malaysian electoral process competing in a semi-democratic political system that heavily favours the UMNO-led coalition government' Ahmad Hussein (2002: 101).

sincerity. PAS has not been a militant party advocating violent struggles.[20] Nor has it had to be so when successive regimes' 'policies towards Islamists have stressed accommodation and co-optation rather than overt coercion [so that] we see Islamic resurgence blossoming in a non-militant form' (Ahmad Fauzi 2001: 29). Further, PAS has held power in two states, had opportunities of governing (and for extended periods in Kelantan) and been a member of three nationwide coalitions before, namely BN, APU and BA. Consequently, unlike Islamic parties which consistently suffered violent repression in other countries, PAS's hopes of electoral success were not illusory even if they have not been greater than the party's experience.

After PAS's setbacks in the March 2004 election – an 'unfair election' because of UMNO's 'money politics', the regime's intimidation, media distortions, and the Election Commission's gerrymandering and manipulations – PAS nevertheless 'accepted the fact of the outcome'.[21] In fact, PAS politicians, at least in private interviews, do not deny the party's errors, including: renominating 'non-performing' incumbents or fielding unsuitable candidates,[22] neglecting young voters,[23] underestimating the negative impact of limited PAS-led economic development, and being complacent about retaining power in Kelantan and Trengganu (albeit with reduced majorities). It was a realistic PAS Vice-President Mustafa Ali who rejected any suggestion that the party should boycott elections: 'if Pas boycotts the elections and the people do not, then there is no effect at all. It doesn't serve any purpose' (Pereira and Zubaidah 2004).[24]

In defeat, PAS leaders derived some solace from their religious fortitude: 'The Islam of our struggles is true; defeats occur due to the errors and weaknesses of those who advance the struggle, not because of weaknesses and errors in Islam' (Hadi Awang 2002: 24). Yet others should not so readily dismiss their appreciation of the possibilities, neither merely instrumental nor strictly doctrinal, that democracy and Islam may hold for each other:

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[20] Jomo and Ahmad (1992: 99) noted: 'The unexpected and unprecendented (as far as PAS was concerned) harshness of the repression of 1985, expecially the Memali incident, shocked PAS militants into recognising the repressive character and potential of the state. Indications since then would suggest that most PAS members, including the national leadership, have chosen to back off. Despite much PAS rhetoric about the martyrdom (a fate exalted in Islam) of the victims of Lubok Merbau and Memali, the PAS leadership probably recognised that PAS was hardly prepared mentally, let alone physically and organisationally, for violent struggle. Cynical observers have commented that UMNO called PAS's bluff and won.' In 2001, Nik Aziz's son was detained under the ISA on untried allegations of being a member of an underground militant Islamic movement. The arrest of his son was as close to a repressive blow against Nik Aziz himself as could be imagined. And yet neither Nik Aziz nor PAS has been anything but 'constitutional' in their protests.

[21] Interview with Abdul Hadi Awang, Marang, Trengganu, 25 May 2004.

[22] Husam Musa, a member of the Kelantan State Executive Council, thought that PAS lost seven seats in 2004 because of unsuitable nominations. Interview with Husam Musa, Kota Bharu, 21 May 2004.

[23] Interview with Norazman Abdul Ghani, Kota Bharu, 20 May 2004.

[24] Mustafa Ali maintained that eventually the political system will develop into a 'two-coalition system' since no one party, not even UMNO can rule on its own. Interview with Mustafa Ali, Kuala Trengganu, 26 May 2004.

> although democracy is a creation of the West, not of Islam, and is full of pronounced weaknesses and deviations, Islam accepts the liberties and rights conferred by democracy and profits from them in order to express the teachings of Islam, conduct *dakwah*, enjoin righteousness and prohibit sin (Hadi 2002: 23).

III. Islamic governance and moral economy

Away from the electoral process, one critical matter for PAS was how to manage a government. The party encountered at least three different kinds of diffficulties. First, the Kelantan state civil service (but less so that in Trengganu) was constitutionally placed under the authority of the Sultan, not within the office of the Mentri Besar. Senior officers of the state civil service were not, ultimately, accountable to the PAS-led administrations.[25] Second, payments of various kinds – notably development funds, and mandatory contributions to state revenues – were either delayed, withheld or 'rechanneled' (via Federal agencies). Third, from 1990 to 1995, for example, although UMNO did not hold a single state seat in Kelantan:

> the Federal Government has sent its army known as the JPP. We create *penghulu* and they create *penghulu*. We appoint *penggawa*, they appoint *penggawa*. We make DOs, they make DOs. We appoint the MB, they appoint an MB, too.[26] Formerly they charged that we had two *imam*,[27] now they have two of everything … In no other democratic country in the world do people work this way (Abdul Aziz 1995: 149–50).

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[25] A colleague has suggested that this was a considerable difficulty for the Nik Aziz adminstration. The author was unable to obtain detailed information on this matter. But the Mentri Besar's control over the state civil service was probably less contentious during the APU period, when S46 supplied intimate links to the royal house, than after S46's split with PAS.

[26] JPP stands for Jabatan Pembangunan Persekutuan (Federal Development Department). Kelantan is administratively divided into *jajahan* or districts, for each of which there is a District Officer (DO). Each *jajahan* is divided into several *daerah* (nominally sub-district), with each *daerah* being headed by a *Penggawa*. Each daerah is further divided into several *mukim* (sometimes translated as 'parish'); each mukim is headed by a *Penghulu* who may have responsibility for several *kampung* (villages). The MB, *Mentri Besar*, of a state in Malaysia is its Chief Minister.

[27] In the 1980s, the issue of two *imam* (leader of prayers), seen as dividing the *ummah*, was typically blamed on PAS intolerance. But Kershaw (1969: 52) had observed such divisiveness: '… whereas before 1959 incipient modernity and tradition could co-exist within such received institutions as the family, reciprocal hospitality connected with private and public ceremonies, and Islam, politics has brought a bitter polarization even within families and between men who were accustomed to worship as brothers at the same mosque. Mosques and suraus have become identified with one or other of the two parties and attract the corresponding part of the village population. Shops draw their clientele from one political faction in the same way. The cementing function of hospitality has declined … and today invitations are generally restricted to supporters of one's own party.... There is much genuine despair on both sides at this evil which has overtaken Malay society.' Also, see Kessler (1978: 130–60) for local details of 'an unremitting intensity of party conflict in Jelawat', not attributable to PMIP instransigence alone, that affected everyday life, sports, prayers and control of local councils. Even then there was a two *surau* (mosque) problem.

The Federal Government's hostile tactics were not peculiar to PAS-led Kelantan's experience. But the tactics were effective in the highly centralised federal system of Malaysia. There is such a great discrepancy in scope and degree of power, and types and levels of resources between the Federal government and any other State government that the former practically holds individual states at its mercy. Similar tactics made over a decade helped to remove the Parti Bersatu Sabah government in 1994. Not risking having to face them was a reason for the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia rump to join the BN two decades earlier.

What meanings, then, could Islam have in an administration that is so hemmed in?

At one level, Nik Aziz strove to infuse his government with austerity, thrift, care and transparency. He set a personal example. He lived modestly in his own house, close to and accessible to his community. He reduced his salary and official allowances, and limited the use of his official car. Other members of the State Executive Council took a ten per cent salary reduction and contributed to various funds.[28] In turn, Nik Aziz exhorted civil servants to adopt 'the spirit of contract, not a spirit of salaried work' (Abdul Aziz 1995: 13) and only to expect remuneration proportionate to their effort. Since amply financed large-scale socio-economic projects were difficult to implement under severe economic and funding constraints, Nik Aziz tried to maintain his as a popular government staying close to the people by 'stressing values of social collectivism, civil justice and redistribution through Islamic practices' (Hilley 2001: 194). Both might thereby *Membangun Bersama Islam* (Develop With Islam).

A socio-cultural route to that goal was to recover the richness of Kelantan's communitarian traditions:

> Faced with our state's poor condition, a condition caused by their neglecting us as if we're their stepchild, Praise be to God, we can develop by *muafakat jimat-cermat* [thrift by consensus] and *gotong-royong* [mutual aid] … That's why I've always maintained that Kelantan's being short of money doesn't really matter as long as the people support [the government]. The people's support is like money, of an extremely high value (Abdul Aziz 1995: 38).

Another path was offered by a kind of 'moral economy' that envisaged an acceptance of 'a lower standard of material existence … not incompatible with the existing capacity of the people' (Halim 2000: 3). While the 'existing capacity of the people' was surely bolstered by the easy availablility of a wide range of

[28] When the 1997 financial crisis developed and the Federal government announced a salary cut for the Cabinet, Nik Aziz responded that Kelantan and its leadership had been on salary cuts and a 'thrift drive' since 1990 (Ismail 1999: 382).

relatively cheap produce and consumer goods from Thailand,[29] the thrust of PAS's 'moral economy' was to lighten the economic burdens of everyday and community life by small and practicable remedies, popular or administrative. For example, since Federal funding for large-scale infrastructural projects unjustly lay beyond PAS's control,[30] Nik Aziz was proud that the people

> were prepared to carry out *gotong-royong*; to establish *wakaf* [bodies for public benefaction] … build small roads … build small mosques … build small prayer rooms. The *gotong-royong* practised by the people of Kelantan is clear proof that they love the present government (Abdul Aziz 1995: 48).

The government transferred its own monetary deposits from interest-bearing accounts to banks that maintained 'interest-free Islamic banking' accounts in accordance with the Quranic injunction against *riba*.[31] By the same injunction, the state established pawnshops that did not levy interest charges, and privately-owned pawnshops were encouraged to follow suit.[32] Moreover, the Kelantan government removed the 'service charge' that was previously levied on loans to civil servants (Abdul Aziz 1995: 127). In like vein, the government called for the termination of fees for television licences, renewal fees for driving licences, and road tax (Abdul Aziz 1995: 4–6).[33] Land and agriculture were important for PAS. In Kelantan (and later in Trengganu) PAS sought to improve land administration to accelerate the processing of applications for land.[34] Characteristically, Nik Aziz expressed a preference for 'industries based on agriculture and animal husbandry' because

> They represent industries that truly benefit target groups that we consider important and deserving of priority, that is, ordinary people who are evenly distributed among the poor. Should these industries succeed, they will change the standards of living of those people. Such industries also don't bring much adverse effect upon our society because they don't involve outsiders much. Other industries, such as manufacturing, don't simply

[29] As more than one resident or observer of Kelantan had remarked to me. There are three gazetted border-crossing points via which Thailand and Kelantan engage in considerable trade.
[30] For examples of how the Federal government squeezed Kelantan via restrictions on funding for several infrastructural projects, see Abdul Aziz (1995: 206–207).
[31] PAS interprets *riba* to mean interest while other interpretations stress that it is usury that is prohibited. The range of Islamic debates on *riba* is much wider and more complex (Haque 1995).
[32] State-owned pawnshops operating by this basic principle were already in existence in Trengganu under the UMNO/BN administration.
[33] Note that this section referring to the different licences and fees comes from an excerpt of a speech made by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah in 1995 while he was S46 President and S46 was still PAS's ally in APU.
[34] Between 2002 and 2003, the Department of Land and Mines in Trengganu processed over 50,000 applications for land, compared with an average of 1,000 applications per year before 1999. A former civil servant who spoke to the author, on confidentiality, remarked that PAS was earnest about resolving the land application delays and problems inherited from the UMNO/BN administration. Confirmation on this point was later provided during my interview with Abdul Hadi Awang, Marang, Trengganu, 25 May 2004.

> benefit outsiders economically (because the factories are owned by foreign investors), they have an adverse impact on our social system, expecially on our youth (Dinsman 2000: 137).

Quite interestingly, in Trengganu, Hadi Awang was to insist that 99-year leases were granted for residential land – because 'housing is a pillar of life' – but only three-year temporary occupation licenses would be given to an applicant for agricultural land until the 'tiller' proved himself worthy of continued land occupation and ownership.[35] Finally, PAS was not against tourism. But in hotel development, say, PAS preferred hotels that were true to their original homely purpose of providing safe lodging to travellers and tourists, not those turned into sites of vice or embodiments of 'western cultural domination' (Ismail 1999: 29).

Whether or not a PAS government endowed with ample funds could or would have progressed beyond the limited framework of moral economy to show what 'Islamic development' might mean cannot be known now. The possibility was there in 1999 when PAS regained control of Trengganu. For 25 years, when UMNO/BN ruled Trengganu, Petronas, the national petroleum company, paid the state an annual royalty for oil taken off the waters of Trengganu. However, Petronas, at the Federal government's instruction, unilaterally terminated payment to the Hadi Awang government. Instead, the money, then worth approximately RM850 million a year, was reclassified as *wang ehsan* (goodwill money) and was rechanneled to Trengganu projects via Federal government development agencies and authorities. Under the circumstances, it is not just PAS politicians who will find hollow the constant criticisms that there was no 'development' under PAS. Or, as Nik Aziz once remarked, 'The federal [government] should not show it is the champion in an economic race and we are a tortoise because we cannot race under conditions that restrict us'; indeed:

> the approach of a group of 'desperadoes', who want to see Kelantan tortured and who wait to say the state government has failed to advance the state economy and the people's development, is an approach driven by a narrow and negative spirit.
>
> Kelantan's economic achievements should be viewed in the context of state and federal responsibilities, because Kelantan remains a unit of the federation. If Kelantan is backward, it means the federation has also failed, and vice-versa. (Ismail 1999: 5)

Away from economic issues, governance meant demonstrating the quality of an Islamic leadership that did not separate religion from politics. PAS's elected representatives, notably the *ulama* among them, regularly led prayers at their

[35] The use of the word 'tiller' is mine but 'land to the tiller' would be a usage in the spirit of Hadi's distinction between different 'rights' to different categories of land. Among the first steps taken by the Hadi government was to abolish municipal council property assessment rates (taxes) on houses on the same principle regarding housing. Interview with Abdul Hadi Awang.

mosques and organised other kinds of religious-communitarian activities. Again Nik Aziz showed the way. On Friday mornings, Nik Aziz would normally deliver his famous *kuliyyah* (lecture) in the heart of Kota Bharu. He led the faithful, men and women seated in the streets and on pavements, in reading the Quran. Then he gave his *tafsir* (interpretation) of selected verses. These Friday sessions were occasions of piety and sobriety. But there were elements of a market-type festivity. People, including tourists and out-of-state visitors who came specially to listen to 'Tok Guru', milled in the main areas open to makeshift stalls but closed to vehicular traffic. Later Nik Aziz's *kuliyyah* would be transcribed and reproduced in books, casette tapes and video compact discs to be sold around the country. One might liken Nik Aziz's Friday *kuliyyah* to a hybrid of a *pondok* (religious school) class and a party *ceramah* (political talk) that 'localized Islamist discourse', as an insightful analysis of Nik Aziz's *tafsir* put it (Farish 2003). After all, the lectures were at once religious and political. So to speak, the lectures made no distinction between Kelantan as Serambi Mekah (The Verandah of Mecca), an old sobriquet of Kelantan, and as Universiti Politik Terbuka (Open University of Politics), a title now bestowed by Nik Aziz:[36]

> this university of politics which we've begun to open in Kelantan now is not covetous of certificates, is not covetous of any kind of qualification. It is only desirous of consciousness, desirous of understanding that is so deep as to reach the next world (Abdul Aziz 1995:42).

Once, in an inventive sequential conflation of the several identities of a people who had chosen to 'Develop With Islam' in the face of adversity, Nik Aziz greeted them thus: 'We Muslims, particularly we Malays, more particularly we Kelantanese, and even more so we who live in a state whose government is based upon Islam as a way of life …' (Abdul Aziz 1995: 10). Surely such a people were select enough to be trusted to face material blandishments without being corrupted? Hence,

> If someone wants to give money, take it; give sugar, stir it; give cloth, wear it; give a cow, lead it away; then vote Angkatan. Try repeating this! Give money, take it; give sugar, stir it; give cloth, wear it; give a cow, lead it away; then vote Angkatan. If those Kelantanese who like *dikir barat* want to make a song of this, they can, too (Abdul Aziz 1995: 159).

Such a state as Nik Aziz's Kelantan could demand of PAS's elected representatives that they should be accountable to the electorate. That was not

[36] 'Because of *pondok-pondok* [religious schools] such as this and other *pondok-pondok* before them, Kelantan has been known as Serambi Mekah. We don't actually know who gave this name of Serambi Mekah to Kelantan' (Abdul Aziz 1995: 42).

to say they would all live up to the ideal.[37] Since some did not,

> nearing this election, I've to say there are among the elected representatives we chose those whom we must change. We must change a bit, have new screws and new nuts. Hopefully that will give us satisfaction although it's definitely not possible to satisfy everyone (Abdul Aziz 1995: 48).

And because 'I've received many complaints which, like it or not, I must accept', Nik Aziz replaced thirteen PAS incumbents for the 1995 general election.

Of course, such an Islamic administration could require of its people, too, that they should lead pious lives and conduct themselves morally in accordance with Islamic injunctions and teaching. Examples were set by leadership but assistance could come from the government. There were programmes for *pembersihan jiwa* (soul cleansing) – mostly to expand and deepen religious education, understanding and observance. Some measures could be readily taken in pursuit of an Islamic vision of development as 'a balance of spiritual and material development'. For example, time had to be made available for personal reflection and family life. Kelantan (and later Trengganu) shortened the work week for state civil servants to five days (while the Federal Government maintained a five-and-a-half day work week),[38] and declared one of the two non-working days 'Family Day'. The state civil service in Kelantan (and again in Trengganu later) extended fully paid maternity leave from 42 to 60 days. Other measures required official funding. The 1999 Kelantan state budget, for instance, ranked expenditure for the 'religious sector' second only to 'administration' (Ismail 1999: 502–503). Alternatively, individuals, organisations, businesses and government agencies were encouraged to contribute to the Tabung Serambi Mekah, a fund to help the poor in Kelantan (Ismail 1999: 163–65).

But from an administration based on Islam as *ad-Din* would come, too, regulations, restrictions and prohibitions. There was a ban on all forms of gambling (to which, PAS said, the representatives of religions other than Islam acceded).[39] The number of outlets selling or serving alcohol (only to non-Muslims) were reduced but not banned (since the consumption of alcohol was not proscribed by other religions). *Menutup aurat*, minimally to cover one's head, was expected of Muslim women and required of their counterparts in the civil

[37] For the 2004 election, Ustaz Mohamad Daud, a PAS representative who had a reputation for being incorruptible, was initially excluded from the list of PAS candidates. Following popular protests against his exclusion, Nik Aziz reinstated 'Daud Iraqi' (so nicknamed because he had studied in Iraq) as a candidate on grounds that PAS needed a 'clean' government. After the election, when it was was still unclear if PAS had really won, Nik Aziz gathered the elected PAS representatives in Hotel Ansar, Kota Bharu, for three days, presumably to prevent any defection to UMNO.

[38] The Federal Government followed by adopting a five-day week for civil servants two weeks in a month!

[39] See Husam (2003) for an extended criticism of gambling and the Federal government's 'complicity' in it.

service, while Muslim men were encouraged to adopt articles of dress emblematic of Muslim identity (Dinsman 2000: 110–11). There were rulings to discourage the 'free mixing of the sexes' in public places. The Kota Bharu Municipal Council closed video-game and *karaoke* centres, and other types of entertainment and service establishments suspected of being sites of *maksiat* (vice). Either following a *fatwa*[40] issued by the Majlis Agama Islam Kelantan (Kelantan Islamic Council), or the revocation of licences by the Kota Bharu Municipal Council, several kinds of Malay or Kelantanese artistic forms were prohibited or ceased to be performed (Dinsman 2000: 114–17).[41]

Someone once asked Nik Aziz, 'Was UMNO correct in saying Pas used religion to oppose progress?' (Abdul Aziz 1995: 102). The person who asked the question was an Australian journalist, but he or she could have been any 'secularist' who intituitively separated politics from religion, and left religion out of an evaluation of progress. Nik Aziz replied:

> I say, if I don't want progress what's the point of my being head of government … it'd be better if I was a leader of prayers teaching the Quran to children, teaching *fardu ain*.[42] When I'm tired, I sleep, and whatever happens outside the prayer room, let it be.
>
> But I'm head of government, I search for funds, I prepare the budget. My officers work, my friends in government think of ways to carry out progress. The only difference between us [PAS] and them [UMNO] is, the progress we bring is progress that saves the people from this world to the next world. I wouldn't have anything to do with progress that can only be brought about by money if with the money comes God's wrath (Abdul Aziz 1995: 102–103).

In that simple and yet profound response one might glean a sense of the totality of PAS's Islamic concepts and policies that claimed to infuse governance with morality and balance material development with spirituality.

IV. Conclusion

Malaysian society has become more Islamised since the 1970s as a result of the Islamic resurgence, UMNO's policies and PAS's influence.[43] Still, Kelantan

[40] Legal ruling by Muslim jurists.
[41] Two types of 'dance dramas', *makyong* and *menora*, were prohibited by *fatwa*, while *wayang kulit* and *main puteri* performances ceased.
[42] Individual duties required of each Muslim, including daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan.
[43] 'The groundwork for state Islamization was actually laid down by UMNO itself, even though that may be spurred by the raising of the Islamic ante by PAS. If Mahathir claims that political Islam touted by PAS deflects the energies of the Malays into non-worldly and materially regressive pursuits, it no doubt will be recalled that under UMNO the institutionalization of Islam became widespread and hegemonic in the everyday lives of the Malays. What Mahathir hoped

since 1990 has not been an 'Islamic state' if the term connotes a theocratic political system. Nor was Trengganu from 1999 to March 2004.

Leaving aside the variations peculiar to each state, their politics was broadly embedded in the linkages between the revitalisation of Islam as political idiom, PAS's uneven recovery of a measure of power under 'fortuitous' conditions, and an *ulama* leadership's strained attempt to govern its own 'peripheral' state in defiance of a powerful centre. The revitalisation of the political idiom of Islam resulted from a confluence of two ideological movements – that is, a conservative movement of radical discontent, and a radical movement of conservative discontent. PAS returned to power in Kelantan in 1990, very much riding on the UMNO splits of 1987–88 and 1998–99. The *ulama* leadership had first to work with its S46 ally to displace UMNO in Kelantan in 1990, and then with the BA to supplant UMNO in Trengganu in 1999. In hindsight, though, perhaps the backlash against PAS that almost ended PAS rule in Kelantan and brought UMNO back in Trengganu in 2004 would have occurred in 1999 had not the 'Anwar factor' and *Reformasi* 'postponed' the backlash.

Each of these ideological and political developments involved social division and intense rivalry in a Malay society that was being rapidly transformed within a Malaysian political economy that was itself undergoing massive structural changes. But, by the same token, most of the contours of UMNO-PAS rivalry never neatly corresponded to clearly demarcated class lines or rigidly held differences of religiosity. Of course, the Malaysian state's economic interventionism under the NEP and the proliferation of UMNO's politico-corporate networks created powerful coalitions of Malay elites, and sponsored the emergence of middle and professional classes. While these groups owe a basic loyalty to UMNO's nationalist-capitalist project, theirs is a story as much of conflict as of cohesion so that continual instability marked the nationalist-capitalist project.[44]. On the other hand, sections of Malay society benefitted a lot less from or were 'turned off' by the change from UMNO's historic mission of Malay nationalism to its corporate mission of Malay capitalism. These sections were likely to rally around PAS, but equally they were more vulnerable to the politics of development and money. In reality, both UMNO's nationalist-capitalist project and PAS's religious project drew cross-cutting support from different Malay classes. Seen from another perspective, many Muslim voters reject PAS for non-religious reasons – the lack of economic development, complacent incumbency, and the neglect of specific group interests – while many Malay

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for was a rolling-back of Islamization without proclaiming that religion must be loosened from the institutions of governance.' Maznah (2004: 162)

[44] Nik Aziz said of the pre-1990 'political instability' in Kelantan: 'A big part of that came from political conflicts between specific parties and the palace, state administrative officers and also the people. This instability disappeared after the 1990 election. It is sure to be repeated if the same party rises again because the principal antagonists who were rejected by the people remain the stalwarts of the party.' (Ismail 2000: 6). For an analysis of the two major crises in UMNO – its 1987 split and Anwar's dismissal in 1998 – in relation to the instability of the state's nationalist-capitalist project, see Khoo (2003: 174–81).

voters oppose UMNO for non-material reasons – corruption, ostentation and arrogance unmitigated by the 'counterfeit religiosity of the rich man'.[45]

There is, thus, a rich and complex texture to the socio-political life of Kelantan and Trengganu, the two most important sites of 'Islam and politics' in Malaysia, that is not amenable to formulaic interpretations of 'Islamic fundamentalism' based on its supposedly reflexive recoil from an unexamined Modernity. Of that socio-political life, only a superficial glimpse has been provided by this essay. But, perhaps even that glimpse indicates a useful guide to the analysis of future developments in 'Islam and politics' in Malaysia. At least, it may provoke the question – 'Why did PAS fall in Trengganu and barely survive in Kelantan practically at the moment the party unveiled its *Islamic State Document*?' – just as PAS now poses itself a critical question, 'Should PAS aim for power, remain in opposition, or be a *dakwah* movement?'[46] But all that must form the goal of another 'search for Islam'.

[45] 'The Alliance policy of pouring rural development money into mosque construction (the Federal Government cannot, obviously, offer land, except in other states through other state governments) is easily ridiculed as the counterfeit religiosity of the rich man. We, poor folk of Kelantan do not need a mosque in which to pray to God, says Mohamed Asri, the Chief Minister.' Kershaw (1969: 65, fn. 13).

[46] For information about this PAS soul-searching, I thank Francis Loh.

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