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Second International Malaysian Studies Conference
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University of Malaya
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Second International Malaysian Studies Conference

The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference was held at the University of Malaya from 2-4 August 1999. It was attended by local participants from Malaysia, as well as many from such countries as the UK, Germany, Denmark, Japan, and the US. The papers addressed issues relating to Malaysia, particularly with regard to economics, politics, education, culture, technology, and religion, especially Islam. The following pertains to the sessions which made most reference to Islam. The Conference as a whole, however, was not confined to Islam.

Communities

Khoo Salma Nasution @ Khoo Su Nin, 'Colonial Intervention & Transformation of Muslim Waqf Settlements in Urban Penang: Case Study of Capitan Kling Mosque & Acheen Street Mosque Waqf', dealt with *waqf* lands, endowments of the early migrant Muslim communities in Penang. It was expected that the descendents of the Muslim leaders would continue to manage the endowments. However, when British intervention in the administration of these lands began in the early 20th century, contradictions between Islamic laws on *waqf* and the British laws resulted in years of legal disputes.

Abdur-Razzaq Lubis, in his paper on 'The Mandailing Role in Malaysian History' discussed ethnic Mandailing, a minority group in both Malaysian and Indonesian history, and examined the question of 'who the Mandailing are' on a historical basis.

Timo Kortteinen, in his paper on 'Social Hierarchies in Flux: Change of Social Organization in Kuala Selangor', studied the develop-

ment and social changes in a small township – Kuala Selangor, which in a way reflects social change in Malaysia as a whole.

Research in Islam

This presentation session began with Maznah Mohammad's summary of her paper on 'Democratization and Islamic Family Law Reform in Malaysia'. According to Maznah, the Islamization in Malaysia includes Islamic Family Law, which is debated on by two parties, modernist UMNO and the conservative PAS. In the context of women's issues, UMNO promotes human and gender rights. PAS did so also but did not emphasize the gender rights as UMNO had done. In her opinion, women's issues will be promoted by both parties in the coming elections, an important determinant of the design of future Islamization.

Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan presented a paper on 'Surau and The Urban Ummat: The Case of Bandar Baru Bangi'. She began by listing factors that influenced the revival of the *surau* in urban areas in the 1970s. Her focus was on the activities of some *suraus* in Bandar Baru Bangi, notably Surau An-Nur, which was led by Dr Harun Din, Professor of Islamic Law at UKM. Surau An-Nur was involved in various activities, such as Islamic education, welfare, prayer and donations. The conclusion was that a *surau* can be transformed into an institution of learning and preaching, depending on its resources and management.

Patricia A. Martinez, chairwoman of this session, then presented a paper on 'The Possibilities in Tafsir and Istisfar for Islamic

Discourse in Malaysia'. She explored classical *tafsir* methodology, giving her opinion on its development in Malaysian society. She held that *istisfar* contributes to the study of *tafsir* in certain contexts. Therefore, 'Malaysian *Tafsir*' should emphasize both. She concluded that the study of the Quran in Muslim society, especially Malaysia, should not reject the Western perspective totally since much could be learned.

Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan also read Asma Lafir Beatrix's paper entitled 'Behind the Veil: Islam in Malaysia and Tunisia'.

Islam and Politics

This session, chaired by Prof Osman Bakar, began with Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid's paper on 'Political Dimension of Religious Conflict in Malaysia: State Response to an Islamic Movement in the 1990s'. He focused on the Darul Arqam movement, which was banned by the government in 1994. He claimed that the main reason for the ban was political rather than religious, suggesting that Darul Arqam challenged the government's brand of Islamization.

Farish Noor presented a paper on 'Formation of Political Frontiers between the government and Islamic Opposition during the 1998-1999 Political Crisis of Malaysia'. He gave a chronology of the current situation in Malaysian politics, which he feels is related to past occurrences between the government and Islamic opposition. His main focus was on the importance of political idealism rather than *realpolitik* in the shaping of Malaysian politics in the years to come.

Kikue Hamayotsu discussed the impact of the Islamic reformist movement on the process of nation-building in Malaysia. From her point of view, the development of Islamization in Malaysia was influenced by modernist leadership in UMNO as a ruling party.

Wan Shawaluddin Hassan made a brief summary of the Bosnian issues from the perspective of Malaysian government policy in his paper entitled 'Krisis Bosnia dan Dasar Luar Malaysia'. In his opinion, the Malaysian government involved itself in the Bosnian Crisis based on several factors, the most important being to demonstrate to the world the potential of Malaysia as a newly industrialized country. However, he did not deny that the Islamic cause was a major reason for Malaysia's involvement in the crisis. ◆

The full original conference report was compiled by Mohd Hazim Shah (Chief Editor), Rogayah Shariman, Wan Sharina, Chai Choon Lee, Badhrol Ghulam Malik, Zuhdi Marsuki, and Liew Chin Tong. See: www.malaysiakini.com/pssm

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