

## The Impact of Islamic Resurgence on the Programmes of Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM)

ZULKIPLE ABD. GHANI

### ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to examine the impact of Islamic resurgence on the management of Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM). Since Islamic resurgence took place in the early 1970, there has been a growing concern among certain groups of Muslims to push for the Islamization of broadcasting media and utilizing these technological devices in order to increase their commitment to Islam. RTM, as a government agency under the Ministry of Information, has to respond and adjust to a certain degree in order to accommodate with the need and demand of the people. This study evaluates how RTM has reacted to the demands of Islamists, changed its policies to accommodate that demands and fulfilled its airtimes with religious programmes. A brief history of RTM and the contents of the programmes are also discussed. This paper argues that RTM has fulfilled its responsibility to the people by broadcasting Islamic Religious Programmes although the services are not entirely based on Islamic principles.*

### ABSTRAK

*Kertas ini membincangkan kesan kebangkitan Islam kepada pengurusan Radio dan Televisyen Malaysia (RTM). Sejak kebangkitan Islam muncul pada awal tahun 1970, terdapat kecenderungan di kalangan kumpulan tertentu di Malaysia untuk mendesak supaya berlakunya proses pengislaman kepada bidang penyiaran termasuk menggunakan teknologi berkenaan untuk menambah komitmen mereka kepada Islam. RTM sebagai sebuah organisasi kerajaan di bawah Kementerian Penerangan telah memberi respons dan menyesuaikan beberapa aspek program dan pengurusannya untuk memenuhi tuntutan berkenaan. Kertas ini menilai bagaimana RTM telah memberi reaksi kepada tuntutan para Islamis dengan mengubah beberapa polisi dan memenuhi masa penyiarannya dengan program-program agama. Sejarah ringkas RTM dan isu kandungan program turut disentuh. Dalam kertas ini penulis berhujah bahawa RTM telah memenuhi tanggungjawabnya kepada masyarakat dengan menyiarkan rancangan-rancangan agama walaupun perkhidmatan berkenaan tidaklah sepenuhnya berdasarkan prinsip-prinsip Islam.*

## INTRODUCTION

The reawakening of Islamic consciousness in Malaysia was not something unexpected, but paralleled the global revival among Muslims elsewhere, particularly as the country has long been predominantly Muslim. In the 1970s, an intensification of Islamic missionary activities has gradually led to the expansion of Islamic institutions and created a greater opportunity to inject Islamic precepts into the other secular fields. RTM, as a government agency, has no exception. In Malaysia and throughout the Muslim world, the main theme being propagated by Islamists is that Islam is comprehensive way of life. The implication of this proclamation is that secularisation is not recognised by Islam because Islam teaches that the religion is not separate but integral to every facet of Muslims' life. The phenomenon of Islamic resurgence are not monolithic, but diverse. "Islamic resurgence" can be defined as a description of the endeavour to re-establish Islamic values, Islamic practices, Islamic institutions, Islamic laws, indeed Islam in its entirety, in the lives of Muslims everywhere. It is an attempt to re-create an Islamic ethos, an Islamic social order, at the vortex of which is the Islamic human being, guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Its ramifications have had a certain degree of impacts on RTM services. This article discusses the relationships between Islam and RTM services. A brief historical perspective of RTM, its management and issues related to the demand of Islamists are also highlighted.

## ISLAM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RTM

Broadcasting in Malaysia was started by a group of enthusiastic amateurs known as the Kuala Lumpur Amateur Radio Society (KLARS) in the mid 1930s. After the World War Two, in 1946, the Broadcasting Department of Malaya was set up by the British authorities and administered from Singapore. It was then called Radio Malaya and it really began consolidating and extending its services in confronting the militant communist threat in 1948. With the achievement of independence in 1957, the moves were made to establish a new radio service based in Kuala Lumpur to serve the young nation. This new service was inaugurated in 1959 and following the formation of Malaysia in 1963, Radio Malaya was renamed Radio Malaysia and its coverage was extended to the new states of Sabah and Sarawak. With regard to television, a service

was launched on December 28, 1963, and known as Television Malaysia, organized on the pattern established by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. This was based on the belief that the Canadian system had certain pertinent factors in common with conditions in Malaysia, that is, a multilingual system to suit the plural society.

In 1968, all information and broadcasting services were integrated under one roof with the opening of the Malaysian Broadcasting Centre at Angkasapuri Complex and one year later radio and television merged under a single Director General, being known as Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) until now. RTM operates under the auspices of government department, the Department of Broadcasting under the Ministry of Information. In tracing the history of broadcasting in Malaya and then Malaysia, the influences of British and Commonwealth countries in terms of technical expertise, personnel assistance and broadcasting philosophy becomes apparent (Asiah, 1982; Lent, 1978; Tripat Kaur Santokh, 1979).

The rapid development of communication technologies since 1980s, especially with regard to electronic media, and caution about the effects of 'information pollution' has led the government to think about the need for a more definite national policy for communication and cultural development. Therefore, the National Telecommunication Policy and National Cultural Policy (NPC) were introduced in order to promote communal goodwill and national development. More specific aims and objectives of RTM were being revealed by the Ministry of Information, and declared to the public at that time as follows:

- a. To explain in depth and with the widest possible coverage the policies and programmes of the government in order to ensure maximum understanding by the people;
- b. To stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve changes in line with the requirements of the government;
- c. To foster national unity in our multi-racial society through the extensive use of the Malay language;
- d. To assist in promoting civic consciousness and fostering the development of Malaysian arts and culture; and,
- e. To provide suitable elements of education, general information and entertainment (Jaafar, 1982).

Amongst the objectives of the proposed new policies were the promotion of the position of Islam as an official religion of the Federation and the freedom of other religions to be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation. Secondly, common values such as ‘belief in God’, in spite of different perceptions, were to be cultivated to form the identity of the Malaysian. In other words, those policies particularly the National Cultural Policy reiterated the isolation of atheistic communism from the mainstream of Malaysian life. Thirdly, the eradication of poverty across all racial boundaries and redistributing opportunities among the races to restructure society became ‘agenda-setting’ for broadcasters and other communication practices. Fourthly, Malay, the National Language, was to play an important role in stimulating national integration. And finally, culture as defined in the proposed NCP as “the way of life comprising thoughts and creativity for the purposes of fulfilling human biology, society and an environment which is suitable to human needs, physical and spiritual” was declared to be based on three principles:

- a. National Cultural Policy must be based on the indigenous cultures of people in this region;
- b. Elements in other cultures which are suitable and practicable can be adapted as national culture; and,
- c. Islam is an important element in the National Cultural Policy. (Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia, 1983).

With its zeal to pursue development and the ideal of national unity, but conditioned by the sensitivity of the pluralistic society, RTM’s operation has resulted in the consistent claim that it adheres to a policy that popularity is less important than serving and educating its audiences. Nevertheless, when Malaysia entered into a new era of local broadcasting with the commencement of the first commercial television station known as TV3 in September 1983, the competition between both stations has caused RTM to question its policy. RTM came to fear that it would lose its audiences. The coming of TV3 was described by one scholar as follows:

“When TV3 entered the scene, it made it quite clear that its purpose was to enrich the entertainment content of Malaysian TV, but otherwise remain compliant to all government orders. It was more a corporate business than an agent for social change or development. It had to make money first and talk about social commitments later, if at all” (Karthigesu, 1987).

The introduction of commercial broadcasting has forced RTM to redefine its operations, introduced new programmes in which to some extent challenged its existing objective and policy. Soon, a new policy known as MEMO (Money and Message) was introduced in the middle of 1980s and described by the then its Director General as:

“RTM has two functions: the first is to disseminate information in order to create an informed society, and the second is to make profit in order for supporting our activities” (Jaafar, 1992).

The change, however, has brought about some critics from local communication scholars and media practitioners. For example, Shahrom (1991), a TV producer, notes that “before 1984, RTM was proud of its policies as a medium for disseminating information, education and entertainment, but the priority of RTM now is profit, entertainment, information and education (in order)”. Similarly, Karthigesu (1994) from Malaysia Science University argues that RTM should preserve its social obligation as “revenue and popularity were not what RTM, as a responsible national organisation, was after”.

Those concerned with moral values as well as Islamists have called on the government to revise the policies of RTM in order to build a society based on the principles of morality and ethics. Even the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad himself in response to a report of the Cabinet Broadcasting Control Panel that the number of violent scenes shown on television had increased sharply, took the positive step of instructing RTM to reduce the violent content on television, if not to eliminate it totally. Furthermore, a resolution issued by a Seminar on *Televisyen ke Arah Kecemerlangan Bangsa dan Negara* held in 1991 stated that “television should be utilised to build human dignity, thoughts and values in order to achieve socio-economic development and the Vision 2020. In another two-day Congress held in July 1993 entitled “Towards the 21st Century: Islam and Vision 2020” (IKIM, 1992) one of the conclusion arrived was the pervasive demand by delegates to ensure that “the mass media, especially television, should contribute more positively towards building a society with high morals and values”. Malaysia is expected to attain to the status of a “fully developed” nation by the year 2020. The nation, it was assumed by delegates, would be developed in terms of knowledge, efficiency and affluence without

losing moral values and religious teachings. In the result, it would effect a balance between material development and spiritual attainment. In Mahathir Mohamad's words, "We should be a developed country in our own mould. Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically, and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride, and confidence" (IKIM, p. 19). The policy of achieving Vision 2020 has been pursued by the Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi since 2004 using a new slogan known as "Islam Hadhari" (Civilisational Islam). Islam Hadhari, in the words of the Prime Minister is projected as a "wholesome approach towards developing the human, society and country based on the perspective of Islamic civilization. It is a comprehensive and holistic approach towards creating a civilisation particularly in Malaysia" (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 2007).

Currently, RTM operates 8 radio stations and 2 television networks. Radio stations are broadcast in Malay, English, Chinese, Tamil and aboriginal dialects. Meanwhile, 2 television networks known as TV1 and TV2, televise local and imported programmes especially in Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. It has been argued that Malaysia as a multi ethnic country has to have broadcasting services in various languages in order to reach all citizens, although the priority is given to the Bahasa Malaysia, the National Language. Meanwhile, private network stations have mushroomed since the last five years. Besides TV3 mentioned earlier, new television channels emerge, i.e NTV7, 8TV, 9TV and ASTRO satellite TV. In short, broadcasting, as an institution in society, does not exist in a vacuum. Its policies and objectives have been influenced by many factors such as political philosophies, economic conditions, and social structures.

#### ISLAM IN RTM'S ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The study of mass media, in this case the broadcast media, should not cause us to avoid looking at the administrative and production processes. This is because broadcasting is a mass medium only at

the point of delivery, in terms of the number of people it can reach simultaneously. “Gatekeepers”,<sup>1</sup> the people who operate the technology that makes programmes and control the production processes of the programmes that reach the mass audience, are the decision makers, who have the power to make choices as to what people can hear and see (Denis Mc Quail, 1983). As far as the influence of gatekeepers in Malaysian television is concerned, Mohd. Hamdan Adnan (1991: 66) of the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) comments that:

“The background of people managing TV station is also an important determinant in the types of programmes or content offered. In Malaysia, for instance, the very westernized television programmes of the sole private station have been attributed to the fact that in its infancy, it was mainly manned by WOG (western oriented gentlemen)”.

In the case of RTM, even though there are guideline policies, as noted earlier, internal and external influences still exist, as an example given by Vincent Lowe and Jaafar Kamn (1982: 27): “A very pious political head is known to have forbidden scenes showing couples (Muslim with non-Muslim) in an affectionate situations”.

Concerning the history of Islamic religious programmes broadcast over Radio Malaysia, Asiah Sarji (1982), a communication scholar from National University of Malaysia noted that between 1930-1957, Islamic programmes like reading and interpretation of the Qur’an, religious talks and Friday sermons were broadcast through radio. The percentage of such programmes compared with other programmes (entertainment in particular) in the early history of Malaysian broadcasting was certainly small. Due to the consistent pressure from some Muslims and Islamic movements who wanted to see more quality and quantity of Islamic religious programmes broadcast on radio and television, this forced RTM to appoint religious broadcasters. As a result, in 1971, Radio Malaysia broadcast thirteen religious programmes a week: *Islam and Society*, *Islamic Education*, *Ray of Islam*, *Friday Prayer*, *Content of the Qur’an*, *The Quranic Course*, *Religious Songs*, *Short Story*, *Reflections*, *God’s Blessing*, *Invocation of God*, *Reading from the Qur’an* and *Prayer Call*. The last five programmes were broadcast daily, the others once or twice a week. Each programmes occupied a different period of time, from three minutes to half an hour (Abu Bakar Ahmad, 1971) However, the development of religious programmes on Television

Malaysia lag behind radio. Up to January 1973, only 30 minutes a week of religious programmes were able to be transmitted through TV1 and TV2. This was due to the several reasons such as the technical complexities of producing programmes, the limited participation of religious people, individuals or groups, in scriptwriting or programmes presentation; lack of planning and strategies within RTM, lack of ideas and creativity and lack of funds (Jabatan Penyiaran Malaysia, 1982).

Under the reorganisation of RTM's framework and administrative structure in 1973, the Religious and Dakwah Unit (RDU) was set up and upgraded alongside other units – News, Drama, Entertainment, Public Affairs, and Development and Agriculture. Its establishment marked a recognition by RTM of the need to produce religious programmes in a more systematic manner. It was not until 1981, with a new government under the premiership of Mahathir Mohamad, when in Simon Barraclough's (1983: 958) word "Islam [was] given symbolic prominence", the structure of RDU was once again revised. In order to guard religious programmes against lack of planning and co-ordination, the administrative structure of RDU was separated between radio and television. With this new structure, more staff were appointed, and brought a new dimension, especially for television. As a result, in the early 1980s, RDU was already producing more than 125 Islamic religious programmes per month, some of which were in English, Chinese, and Tamil, and then a noticeable increase in Islamic programmes over RTM could be seen. They include the broadcast of *Azan* (Call for Prayer) five times a day, Qur'anic exegesis, live coverage of sermon during the Friday congregational prayers, and important celebrations in the Islamic calendar, as well as numerous talks and forums on Islam and Islamic issues. The inclusion of a series of Islamic talks by notable Islamic scholars from Indonesia, such as Anwar Mussaddad and, particularly, Dr. Hamka, was in line with this trend" (Hussin Mutalib, 1990: 135).

One of the most popular religious programmes broadcast over TV1 is *Forum Perdana Ehwat Islam* (Premier Forum on Islamic Affairs) which was first televised in 1978. The programme, previously known as *Sinar Islam* (Ray of Islam) and *Ehwat Islam* (Islamic Affairs) was one of the top ten television programmes broadcast by RTM. The programme featured a serious discussion on many topics relevant to Islam. To sustain viewers interest, its

format has been modified from time to time, but it consists of a moderator and two or three panel members. At the highest of its popularity in the middle of 1990s, there were two different features of this programme which should be mentioned as these contrast with other talk programmes. First, if guest appearances on other religious programmes are the monopoly of religious figures, in this programme one of the panelists is sometimes chosen from other disciplines, in accordance with the topic being discussed. For example, a notable businessman may be invited when the discussion topic is about Islamic business. Second, the dress of the panel members (male) is not always Malay garb; they appear also in Western attire, with tie and coat. This approach is utilised to correspond with the objectives of the programme, that is to present the correct image of Islam as a dynamic, progressive and universally-accepted religion. The programme entered a new era of popularity when it was given a prime time slot, televised at 21:00 to 22:00 on every Thursday night.

Several “technical actions” such as dramatic scenes, interviews and film clips were added to some programmes in this series as ways to lure a large viewing audience. The setting of some of the programmes had also been moved from studio to outside. Interestingly, locations which were usually used for variety shows were used for recording these programmes. Due to the increased on the programme’s popularity, the programme had been sponsored from time to time and advertised in daily newspaper. Further, the popularity of this programme was also claimed by the producer to attract Muslim viewers from Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and even Australia by the use of disc antennas since, the Malay used in the programme could be understood by them (Malay speaking populations). In short, if television can be said to be a stimulator of religious enthusiasm among viewers in Malaysia, this programme may be regarded as a catalyst. Table 1 below presents the example of audience response to the Islamic religious programmes in 2002.

#### THE IMPACT OF ISLAM ON THE PROGRAMMES

RTM in its operations regards Islam as ‘the religion of the Federation’ as enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution. Article 3(1) of Federal Constitution states “Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other

Table 1: Rating for Religious Programmes (TV)

| Programme   | Rating* | No. of Viewers             | No. of Viewers            | Rating |
|---|---------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------|
|   |         | (in '000)<br>29/9 -5/10/02 | (in '000)<br>22/9-28/9/02 |        |
| <i>Forum Perdana Ehwat Islam</i><br>(Premier Forum on Islamic<br>Affairs) (TV1) | 38      | 824                        | 587                       | 80     |
| <i>Fardu Jumaat</i> (Friday Prayer)<br>(TV1)                                    | 91      | 496                        | 453                       | 120    |
| <i>Furqan</i> (Al-Qur'an) (TV1)   | 132     | 413                        | 447                       | 124    |
| <i>Jejak Qari</i> (Track of Qur'an<br>Reciter) (TV1)                            | 137     | 402                        | 291                       | 214    |
| <i>An-Nur</i> (The Light) (TV1)   | 174     | 329                        | 281                       | 222    |
| The Omayad Mosque (TV2)   | 281     | 182                        | n.a.                      | n.a    |
| <i>Keluarga</i> (Family) (TV1)  | n.a.    | n.a.                       | 262                       | 239    |

\*Rating based on 300 the most popular television programmes

n.a. – not available

Data modified from AC Nielson is based on the average adult population (12.3 million)

religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation". This constitutional status provides a firm basis for RTM to broadcast the Islamic message, and it claims that it has played an important role in disseminating the message. RTM divides its religious programmes into two categories: projecting programmes to Muslims and undertaking the message to non-Muslims as well. In the latter case it argues that non-Muslims should be made to understand Islam, particularly its universal values such as toleration, which may be shared by other religions in order to avoid religious tensions. It is the fact that the provision for Islam in the Constitution yields some advantages for RTM.

The intensification of Islamic activities, in particular the launching of the government's Islamization policy under the premiership of Mahathir Mohamad since 1982, has provided an ample opportunity for Islamists to present the true meaning of Islam to civil servants including those in the Ministry of Information. A frequent Islamic activities organised by the Islamic Welfare Committee under the Ministry of Information, such as special celebrations for members of staff who were going to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca and the celebration of special events in the

Islamic calendar also have raised consciousness among RTM's staff towards becoming more Islamic in thought and deed. As a result, according to the then Director of Radio, Zulkifli Abu, some disc jockeys who were sent to the courses under the auspices of the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister Department subsequently used some of their time to give exhortations on moral values and sometimes even explained within entertainment programmes the meanings of Islam. Such activities seems to be generating a momentum for Islamic message to penetrate not only Islamic programmes as discussed above, but also other programmes such as drama, commercials, and news.

With regard to the production of local drama, V. Lowe and Jaafar Kamin (1982) postulate that in the case of pressure from Islamic reformists, the government take care that programme content conforms to nearly all their demands (See also Tee-Tuan Foo, 2006). For instance, mixed marriages when portrayed in dramas always depict the non-Muslims converting to Islam, and not *vice versa*. This is because Muslims in Malaysia are particularly sensitive concerning on the issue of conversion. Elsewhere, Lowe and Kamin (1982) state:

“Programmes are vetted to see that they conform to Islamic codes of behaviour and morality... No possibility is allowed for any immoral connotations. A script submitted was edited to show a man taking a woman for a walk in a public park rather than as in the original script, which showed them going to a coffee house. Muslim couples who are unmarried are forbidden to be in proximity in private places... In yet another drama script a Malay girl commits suicide by jumping from a high rise building. In the actual script used the girl's name was changed to 'Lisa' a non-Muslim name”

Furthermore, Vincent Lowe and Jaafar Kamin (1982) argue that care is also taken to strip Islam of syncretic elements in any portrayal of the religion. In this case they note:

“In an entertainment programme, the backdrop for a Malay singer was the rocky surface of some limestone hills famous for its Hindu shrines. The texture of the rocks was used to create good angles and some innovative frames in the song sequence. Five or six previews were held before the entire sequence was banned. Apparently the heads of Television Malaysia could not agree among themselves so they asked the Minister to decide. The Minister, returning from electioneering and perhaps closer to Islamic reformist groundswells generally against the practice of syncretist Islam (*sic*) especially those due to Hindu influences, decided against the sequence being shown. In another drama

sequence, a drunkard was shown passing by a mosque. Scenes of the mosque were edited out”.

There have been cases where commercial advertisements were withdrawn from RTM as a result of complaints from Islamists or religious authorities. For example, the Seiko watch company had been running a worldwide campaign using the theme: ‘Man Invented Time, Seiko Perfected it’. A series of commercials with this theme ran on RTM networks during the first part of 1986. Subsequently, RTM received a complaint from the Head of Islamic Studies at the University of Malaya, demanding that the advertisement should be taken off the air because it would affect the creed of Muslims since God, not man, invented time. Accordingly, the agency was told by RTM that they must change their slogan if they wanted to advertise their products again in Malaysia. After consultations, a new theme was developed: ‘Man Invented Timekeeping, Seiko Perfected It’. Then they were able to advertise once more. Another example was when Kentucky Fried Chicken first entered the Malaysian market. They were told that they could only advertise their products if they were *halal* (permissible), slaughtered according to the teachings of Islam. Once the requirements were complied with, they were allowed to advertise on RTM Networks (Katherine Toland Frith, 1987: 103).

Having acknowledged that public comments concerning the influx of foreign culture in advertisement should be entertained, the Ministry of Information set up the Advertising Code as a guideline for commercial advertisements. Among the guidelines which pertain to the interest of Islam are the following:

- a. No advertisement is allowed if it contains scenes of drinking liquor or alcoholic beverages;
- b. No advertisement is allowed if it has scenes of lip-to-lip kissing or long-haired men;
- c. No advertisement is allowed if it contains scenes showing pork or pork products;
- d. No advertisement is allowed if it contains terms, words, scenes or subject matter not generally considered acceptable in polite company; and,
- e. No advertisement containing statements, scenes or suggestions which may offend the religious, racial, political or sentimental susceptibilities of any section of the community is allowed (Ronny Adhikarya, 1977).

To the advertising agencies, the guidelines in the Advertising Code seem to be highly restrictive. To cultural and religious groups, on the other hand, the Code has been labeled a “toothless tiger”. This is because scenes showing such things as images of scantily-clad girls being exploited to sell products, misleading information about products, and the exploitation of children in advertising were still rampant in the broadcast media. Critics from consumer movements and the NGOs Muslim for example, charged that the government had failed to monitor and control alien and dominant cultures in the advertising industry. Though the government introduced a new Advertising Code in October 1990 and claimed to replace ‘materialistic consumer culture’ with ‘made in Malaysia’ scenes, a study showed that the situations were mostly unchanged with 40 percent of scenes of advertisements broadcast by RTM depicting Western life-styles compared with 39 percent local elements and the rest a mixture of both of local and Western (Mohammad Md. Yusof, 1991). The tendency has been contributed to by the business venture trend which has dominated RTM since the coming of private stations.

With regard to the news items broadcast by RTM, Lilian Rae Dunlap (1992), in her content analysis of news stories found that “results show that the Malays, who are the majority, control the television media. News content decisions then rest on the history and culture of Malays and Islam, the official religion of Malaysia”. Her conclusions were based on a three-month observation period in Malaysian television newsrooms (RTM and TV3) from January to April 1988. She found that government and private networks broadcast similar news products and concluded that sources were limited and journalists were under the same legal and social restrictions. Apart from that, she argued that television authorities used news to promote the nation’s prosperity, advancement and independence, but not to report much negative news about the country or the region.

As we have seen, the gatekeepers of RTM have taken into account the teachings of Islam in its local broadcasting output. Nevertheless, the statement by Lowe and Jaafar Kamın that the government takes care that programme content conforms to nearly all Islamic reformists’ demands, noted above, may be disputed. This because only certain matters bearing on Islam which are regarded as having ‘sensitivity’ among Muslims, such as the issues of

conversion, pork products, and alcoholic beverages, have been taken off the air to avoid continual complaints from irate Muslim members of the audience. Further, many studies of imported programmes broadcast by RTM illustrate that the Islamist demands are not fulfilled. For example, a study carried out by Karthigesu (1991) found that 'undesirable behaviour', a phrase used by him to describe behaviour which was incompatible with the Malaysian/ Eastern cultural point of view, was rampant.

The phenomenon of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia is seen by many scholars as no ephemeral or transient development. This is due to the fact that its impact on Malaysian society is wide-ranging, whether at the individual or the collective level. Through various efforts by Islamic government agencies and Islamic NGOs, many Muslims believe that Islam is a total and unified way of life, religious and secular. They hold that Islam is a set of beliefs and a way of worship, a vast and integrated system of law, a culture and civilization, an economic system and a way of doing business, it is a polity and a method of governance, a special sort of society and a way of running a family, prescribes for inheritance and divorce, dress and etiquette, food and personal hygiene and is a spiritual and human totality.

Therefore, when the government announced that a fully moral and ethical society is its main aim in the future, the challenges facing Islamists are to produce more practical solutions and one of these challenges comes from the mass media, especially RTM which is controlled by the government. According to Islamists, the position of Islam in RTM operations does not confirm to their demands for complete Islamization. Several studies of Islamic communications and the efforts to redefine the role of radio and television from an Islamic perspective indicate the need to widen the horizon of the content of Islamic media instead of merely broadcasting the narrow aspects of Islam such as religious talks, forums as well as the reading and interpretations of the Qur'an. Further, the character of Islamic broadcasting, in terms of programmes outputs, must be comprehensive and encompass Islam in its entirety as no secularisation is recognised by Islam. Islamic broadcasting is not simply the broadcasting of so-called 'religious programmes', but should encompass art, culture, information, and other universal programmes which are maintained and guided by Islamic teaching

(Hamid Mowlana, 1989; Yahya Basyuni Mustafa and Adil al-Sairafi, 1985).

It should be acknowledged that managing a broadcasting station, especially with regard to programme content in multi-racial society like Malaysia, is not an easy task. From its early years, RTM has faced the perpetual problem of languages. Then the Islamists' demand that radio and television be operated in consonance with the teachings of Islam also put a lot of pressures on those in management. This is due to the fact that the concept, and more particularly the philosophy, of radio and television from an Islamic perspective are not thoroughly explored (see for further discussion in Zulkiple 2006).

#### CONCLUSION

The operation of RTM is intended to serve the aims and goals of the government. In the broadest sense, RTM's programming is geared towards giving full, in-depth information on government projects and policies with the aim of stimulating public interest and opinion in order to achieve the status of a 'developed nation' by the year 2020. Islam as the state religion has been acknowledged as one of the policies to be considered by RTM in producing its programmes. The ramifications of Islamic resurgence have affected to some extent RTM's local production outputs including drama, commercials, and news and the increase of quality and quantity of Islamic religious programmes. The impact of Islam can be measured not only in religious programmes aired by RTM but also in other programmes.

#### ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> The concept of 'gatekeeper' was first used in the 1950s to describe those in charge of selecting and filtering a particular news item intended to be published or aired by media organizations.

#### REFERENCES

- Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. 2007. *Islam Hadhari Approach. Towards A progressive Islamic Civilisation*. Kuala Lumpur: JAKIM
- Abu Bakar Ahmad. 1971. "Dakwah Islam Melalui Radio dan TV", in *Kumpulan Kuliah dan Syarahan Dalam Kursus latihan Bagi Kadi dan Kursus Pegawai-Pegawai Penerangan Ugama dan Mubaligh Seluruh Malaysia*", Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Perdana Menteri.

- Asiah Sarji. 1982. "The Historical Development of Broadcasting in Malaysia (1930-1957) and its Social and Political Significance", *Media Asia*, vol. 9: 150-160.
- Barraclough, S. 1983. "Managing the Challenges of Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia", *Asian Survey*, vol. 23, no. 8, August: 958-975.
- Frith, K.T. 1987. "The Social and Legal Constraints on Advertising in Malaysia", *Media Asia*, vol. 14, no. 2.
- Glattbach, J. and R. Balakrisnan. 1978. "Malaysia", in J.A. Lent (ed.), *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hamid Mowlana. 1989. "Communication, Ethics, and the Islamic Traditions", in Thomas W Cooper et. al. (eds), *Communication Ethics and Global Changes*, New York: Longman.
- Hussin Mutalib. 1990. *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia. 1992. *Menjelang Abad 21 Islam dan Wawasan 2020*, Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia.
- Jabatan Penyiaran Malaysia. 1982. "Kertas kerja Upgrading Bahagian Agama dan Dakwah", Kuala Lumpur.
- Jaafar Kamin. 1982. "Perkembangan Media Elektronik Dalam Masyarakat Malaysia", in Hamzah Hamdani (ed.), *Media Massa dan Peranannya di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Falsafah/Dasar dan Tujuan Penyiaran TV di Malaysia", paper presented at *Seminar Televisyen: Ke Arah Kecemerlangan Bangsa dan Budaya*, Universiti Sains Malaysia 19-21 July.
- Karthigesu, R. 1987 "Commercial Competition to Government Monopoly in Television: Implications of the Malaysian Experience", *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. 2, December. pp. 76-86.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. "US Television Programmes and Malaysian Audiences", *Media Asia*, vol. 18, no. 2:105-106.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. "Broadcasting Deregulation in Developing Asian Nations: An Examination of Nescent Tendencies Using Malaysia as A Case Study", *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 16: 73-90.
- Kementerian Penerangan Malaysia. 1983 "Penggubalan Satu Dasar Komunikasi Negara, Masalah dan Isu", paper presented at *Simposium ke Arah Dasar Komunikasi Negara*, Kuala Lumpur, 6-9 August.
- Lent, J.A. 1976. "Television in Malaysia", *Television Quarterly*, Vol VIII, May-July.
- Lillian Rae Dunlap. 1992. *New And Different or Simply New: An Intercultural Analysis of Government and Private Television News in Malaysia*, Ph. D Thesis, Indiana University.
- Mc Quail, D. 1983. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, London: Sage Publication.

- Mohd. Hamdan Adnan. 1991. "Development and Anti-Development Messages in Films, Television and Advertising", *Media Asia*, vol. 18, no. 2.
- Mohammad Md. Yusof. 1991. "Iklan Tanpa Batasan Budaya, Moral dan Identiti", *Dewan Masyarakat*, August.
- Mustafa, Y. B. and al-Sairafi, A. 1985. *al-Talifiziyyun al-Islami wa Dauruhu fi al-Tanmiyyah*. Riyadh: Dar al-Alam al-Kutub li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'
- Ronny Adhikarya et al. 1977. *Broadcasting in Peninsular Malaysia*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Shahrom Md. Dom. 1991. "Teman Setia Anda", paper presented at *Seminar Televisyen Ke Arah Kecemerlangan Bangsa dan Negara*, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 19-21 Julai 1991.
- Samsudin Abdul Rahim and Fauziah Kartini Hassan Basri. 1984. "Teknologi Komunikasi Cabar Dasar Komunikasi Negara", *Sasaran*, Disember: 12-16.
- Tripat Kaur Santokh. 1979. *Broadcast Development in Malaysia: Communal Structures and National Aspirations*, Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University.
- Vincent Lowe and Jaafar Kamn. 1982. *TV Programme Management in a Plural Society*, Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.
- Zulkiple Abd. Ghani. 2006. "Islamic Broadcasting: A Search for Islamic Identity", *Hamdard Islamicus*, Vol. XXIX, April-June. pp. 23-33.

Zulkifle Abd Ghani, Ph.D.  
Jabatan Pengajian Dakwah dan Kepimpinan  
Fakulti Pengajian Islam  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.  
E-mail: zulkip@ukm.my

