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**The *Tablighi Jama'at* Movement in the  
Southern Provinces of Thailand Today:  
Networks and Modalities**

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## ABSTRACT

The *Tablighi Jama'at* is perhaps the biggest Muslim missionary movement in the world today and since its formation in Northern India in the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has spread itself worldwide and established its chapters in every country on the globe. Yet despite its expansive networks and its presence in almost all Muslim communities worldwide, little is known about this movement in terms of its membership, funding, modalities of operations and aspirations.

This paper looks at the spread of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in the four southern provinces of Thailand that were once predominantly Muslim and which still retain their Malay-Muslim character. Fieldwork done in the region provided us with the empirical data and anecdotal evidence that later went into the writing of the paper. The aim of this paper is to establish the extent of the *Tabligh* network in the Muslim provinces of the South and to understand how and why it remains an enduring presence there.

The paper will look at how the *Tabligh* situates itself against the broader context of Patani Malay Muslim society, and its interaction with the other Muslim schools of thought and political movements in the region. From this analysis of its competitive-co-operative dynamics with the wider spectrum of Malay-Muslim activism, the paper tries to identify the factors that make the *Tabligh* unique and distinct. It ends with some sample narratives and discourses that were recorded during fieldwork, and attempts to assess the political tone and tenor of the *Tabligh* as it preaches to its followers and positions itself vis-à-vis the Thai government and state security apparatus.

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# **The *Tablighi Jama'at* Movement in the Southern Provinces of Thailand Today: Networks and Modalities**

## **I. Introduction: Following the path of the *Kalimah* in Southeast Asia: The *Tablighi Jama'at* network in Southern Thailand**

The *Tablighi Jama'at* remains until this day the biggest missionary movement of the modern Muslim world and it has spread all across the globe. Southeast Asia has now become one of the most fertile grounds where the Tabligh has extended and expanded its activities, and there exists ample academic studies on the subject of the Tabligh in the region.

Muhammad Khalid Masud (2000) was one of the first to study the global impact of this movement, which he describes as 'a transnational Islamic movement for faith renewal'.<sup>1</sup> Scholars who have studied this movement have highlighted the salient features of the Tabligh as follows: 1. that is a transnational movement in scope and its ambitions, and that its members do not recognise the political boundaries of modern nation-states which they regard as worldly secular concepts; 2. that it is primarily a male-dominated movement for faith renewal that sees its primary target audience and constituency fellow Muslims who need to be brought back to the true path of Islam; and that 3. being a member of the Tabligh movement is not akin to being a member of a political party or organisation, despite the fact that the Tabligh does operate according to modalities and methodologies that can be compared to modern organisations.

We will not dwell at length on the early historical development of the *Tablighi Jama'at* movement as other scholars (Masud, 2000; Metcalf, 1982, 2002; Sikand, 1998<sup>2</sup>) have already written extensively on that subject matter. It would suffice to note that the *Tablighi Jama'at* was formed in the late 1920s (c. 1927) by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (d. 1944), whose family were closely linked to the Deobandi leadership and its sister school the Mazahiru'l-Ulum in Saharanpur. Like

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<sup>1</sup> See: Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*. Brill, Leiden. 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See: Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jama'at 1920 – 1990: A Cross Country Comparative Study*, Unpublished Ph.d thesis, Department of History, University of London, 1998.

the Deobandis, the *Tablighis* were conservative fundamentalists who were inspired by the reformists of the *Wahhabi* movement from Saudi Arabia. Unlike the Deobandis who were educationists, the *Tablighis* were missionary-activists who sought to transform Muslim society and bring Muslims back to the path of true Islam.

In terms of its theology and religious praxis the *Tablighi Jama'at* can be described as a neo-fundamentalist, literalist movement that both aims towards the renewal and purification of faith (i.e. ridding normative Islamic practices of rites, rituals and ideas that they deem un-Islamic) as well as the strengthening of the global Muslim *ummah* through the inculcation of uniform Islamic religious understanding and praxis. Its origins in India and its close links to the Deobandi<sup>3</sup> school of thought have led some scholars like Metcalf (1982) to conclude that it can be categorised under the general heading of a Wahhabi-inspired movement.

Attention to the presence and spread of the *Tabligh* across Southeast Asia, however, was drawn in the writings of scholars on contemporary political and normative Islam including Nagata (1984), Siddique (1985), Muzaffar (1986, 1987) and Noor (2003, 2007).<sup>4</sup> Nagata and Muzaffar have looked at the emergence of the *Tablighi* in

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<sup>3</sup> The *Dar'ul Ulum Deoband* (sometimes referred to as the Deoband college), was founded in the town of Deoband to the northeast of Delhi. It was formed in the year 1867, one decade after the failed Indian Mutiny of 1857. Being strict adherents of Islamic orthodoxy, the *Wahhabi*-inspired founders and teachers of the Deobandi school were thoroughly anti-Mutazilite in their outlook. The Deobandi Ulama were known for their uncompromising and confrontational approach towards outsiders. The school issued 269,215 *fatawa* in its first hundred years, and its Ulama engaged in many polemics against Hindus and Christian missionary movements. The founders of the Deoband school were also of the opinion that only the *Ulama* were qualified to talk about Islam and to interpret the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Under the leadership of *Ulama* like Nanotawi and Gangohi the Deobandi school furthered its aim 'to revive the sanctity of *Hadith* literature that was being challenged by the modernists' like Syed Ahmad Khan, Sayyid Mahdi Ali and Syed Ameer Ali. The Deobandi school held the belief that *Hadith* literature was next to the *Qur'an* in its importance and therefore should not be treated with disrespect. Furthermore, for the traditionalist *Ulama*, *Hadith* literature had become the only valid source of information for historians and biographers. The Deobandi school's reputation as a bastion of *Hadith* preservation finally led to it being recognised by other Islamist movements and thinkers abroad. Another important aspect of the Deobandi tradition was its complex and ambiguous relationship with the Sufi tradition. While the Wahhabi-inspired Deobandis were reluctant to accept and acknowledge many of the practices and rituals of the Sufi *tariqas* (which they argued were contaminated by un-Islamic elements and bordered on the heretical) they nonetheless accepted and adapted many of the Sufi rites and rituals of mutuality and association when it suited them. (See: Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982. and *Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs*. ISIM Papers IV, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), Leiden, 2002. Kenneth W. Jones, 'Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India', In *The New Cambridge History of India*, III. 1. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1989. Pp. 48-60.)

<sup>4</sup> For further readings on the early studies of the movement in Malaysia, see: Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence: A Global View*. In *Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, Taufik Abdullah and

Malaysia in particular, dating its arrival to the West coast of the Malaysian Peninsula around the early 1980s and describing it as a primarily urban-based phenomenon with a particular appeal to the urban-based underclass and industrial class workers living in the newly created industrial zones of states like Johor, Selangor, Penang and Perak.

Our own work (Noor, 2003, 2007) has focused on the Tabligh in the North and Northeastern states of Malaysia, particularly Kelantan and Trengganu, and we have argued that the spread of the Tablighi Jama'at there occurred at the same time as it first emerged in the towns and cities of the West coast, thereby putting into question the thesis that the Tabligh was primarily an urban-based phenomenon. Furthermore we have been able to show that the arrival of the Tabligh to the Peninsula of Malaysia actually occurred much earlier, and that the Tabligh was already established in the northern state of Kelantan by the mid-1970s.<sup>5</sup> (Noor, 2007)

We have also looked at the arrival and spread of the Tabligh in neighbouring Indonesia, where the Tabligh first made its entry during the time of the rule of President Suharto; and when it was then seen as a quietist movement for faith renewal that represented no threat or political challenge to the Suharto regime. This perception of the Tabligh as being a non-political movement partly accounted for why it managed to spread so fast and easily across both Indonesia and Malaysia during the 1970s and 1980s, when other more overtly political Islamist movements were either

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Sharon Siddique (eds.), Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. 1986; Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*. Fajar Bakti Press, Petaling Jaya. 1987; and Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver. 1984. See also: Farish A. Noor, *Salafyya Purists in the land of Shadow Puppets and Hindu Temples: The Tablighi Jama'at in Indonesia*, Paper for the Wissenschaftliche Konferenz zur gegenwartsbezogenen Forchung im Vorderen Orient (DAVO Congress), Hamburg, 20-22 November 2003; and *Pathans to the East! The Historical Development of the Tablighi Jama'at movement in Kelantan, Trengganu and Patani and its transnational links with the South Asia and the Global Islamist Revivalist Movement*. In the Journal of Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. 27. No. 1. Duke University Press. 2007.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of the arrival and spread of the Tablighi Jama'at movement in the northern Malaysian state of Kelantan, see: Farish A. Noor, *Pathans to the East! The Historical Development of the Tablighi Jama'at movement in Kelantan, Trengganu and Patani and its transnational links with the South Asia and the Global Islamist Revivalist Movement*. In the Journal of Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. 27. No. 1. Duke University Press. 2007.

closely monitored (which was the case in Malaysia) or banned and persecuted outright (as was the case in Indonesia during the time of Suharto's military-backed regime).<sup>6</sup>

Apart from Malaysia and Indonesia – both of which happen to be Muslim-majority countries – the Tabligh has also established itself in other parts of Southeast Asia where Muslim communities and enclaves have developed. Thus far few studies have been conducted to comprehensively map out the spread of the Tabligh across the Southeast Asian region, but there is enough circumstantial and anecdotal evidence to

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<sup>6</sup> The arrival of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in Indonesia coincided with the ascendancy of the Suharto regime that was then backed up by the Indonesian armed forces (ABRI, later TNI) and a number of Western-educated technocrats like B. J. Habibie as well as charismatic local elites like Sultan Hamengku Bowono of the court of Jogjakarta. Under Suharto the Indonesian army was given the responsibility to maintain law and order and ensure the territorial integrity of the state. Led by men like Gen. Benny Moerdani, Gen. Ali Murtopo, Gen. A. M. Hendropriyono and others the Indonesian military elite sought to control and eventually eliminate what they regarded as an increasingly dangerous security threat to the country: the rise of political Islam. The Suharto era witnessed the rise of authoritarian politics in Indonesia, which was accompanied by the de-politicisation of Indonesian society. The Islamist parties of Indonesia were forced to merge together into one loosely-assembled bloc, known as the *Parti Persatuan Pembangunan* (Development and Unity Party, PPP) and were no longer allowed to use ostensibly 'Islamic' symbols and slogans in their political activities. It was during this time that Indonesian Islamist intellectuals and activists began to call for a non-political approach to Islamisation in Indonesia and the inculcation of Islamic *values* (as opposed to Islamic *politics*) in Indonesian public life. These new Islamist movements and intellectuals were predominantly concerned about the question of Islamic normative culture and cultural politics, and in many cases their own critiques against the Suharto regime was couched in terms of a culturalist (as opposed to economic-structuralist) discourse that posited the view that the ills of Indonesian society could be remedied if Islamic values and norms were further inculcated into Indonesian public space and political life. It was during this period that the *Tablighi Jama'at* began to make its presence felt in the urban space of Indonesia, which at the time was already a heavy contested arena with numerous actors and agents competing for their share of public attention and support. During the 1970s the *Tablighi Jama'at* began to engage with the members of Indonesia's urban under-classes, hoping to win the support and membership of the urban poor. Its primary constituency, as was the case in Malaysia, was the urban poor and under-represented. Its members were mostly young Indonesian boys aged in their teens to their late twenties. Many of them tended to come from lower middle class or poor families, and many of them also belonged to the growing community of rural migrants who had moved to the already-overcrowded urban centres. The city mosque was the one place where they could seek refuge and succour in the harsh urban environment of rapidly-modernising and developing Indonesia, where the wealth and income differentials between the elite and the underclasses were painfully evident for all to see. As was the case in Malaysia, the Indonesian government – though suspicious of all popular mass-based Islamist movements in general – was willing to allow the *Tablighi Jama'at* to operate in the urban centres of Indonesia (notably Java and Sumatra) for the simple reason that the movement's professedly non-partisan and non-violent approach was seen as non-threatening to the regime. (If anything, it could be argued that such a tendency would actually add to regime continuity and maintenance instead.) Coming as it did at a time when Java was already overpopulated and its cities the hotbeds of social unrest, the *Tablighi's* claim to control its members via rigorous personal discipline and routinised faith practices and rituals seemed to lend support to the Suharto regime's efforts to depoliticise society and keep the resurgent forces of political Islam at bay. The fact that all of its members were males probably made the movement seem more attractive to the ruling elite, who were understandably worried about the growing number of unemployed and frustrated young men in the urban centres. (See: Farish A. Noor, *Salafiyya Purists in the land of Shadow Puppets and Hindu Temples: The Tablighi Jama'at in Indonesia*, Paper for the Wissenschaftliche Konferenz zur gegenwartsbezogenen Forchung im Vorderen Orient (DAVO Congress), Hamburg, 20-22 November 2003.)



show that the Tabligh have been operating among the Muslim minority communities of the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand as well.

The focus of this paper will be the presence and activities of the Tablighi Jama'at in the southern provinces of Thailand, namely the provinces of Patani, Jala and Narathiwat; that border the northern Malaysian states of Kedah and Kelantan. Fieldwork for this paper was carried out in the month of May 2008 in the abovementioned provinces, though the fourth Muslim province of Satun was not covered. Field research was also not conducted in the northern district of Bangkok, for our focus has been primarily on the southern provinces that have a unique history of their own, which we shall look at presently. For reasons that we hope to make clear below, the study of the Tabligh in the South of Thailand can and should be conducted separately from the study of the Tabligh in Bangkok and the other northern cities and provinces owing to the special historical circumstances of the South and how these four provinces were brought into the nation-state of modern Thailand in the first place.

## **II. The *Tablighi Jama'at* in the South of Thailand: Faith renewal in the heart of the Malay-Muslim south of a predominantly Thai-Buddhist country.**

Understanding how and why the Tabligh managed to spread so fast and easily across the four southern provinces of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun requires some understanding of the complex history of the four provinces and their relationship to both the Thai central government based in Bangkok and their fellow Malay-Muslim neighbours in Malaysia to the south.

Present-day Thailand remains a complex country with a plural society made up of ethnic Thais (Tai) and other ethnic-linguistic groups, including Shans, Chams, Karens, Chins, Lao, Khmers, Viets and Malays, among others. It has to be remembered that the historical development of Thailand – unique among the other countries of Southeast Asia by virtue of the fact that it was never colonised by any Western power – is fundamentally a history of ethnic conflict and expansion that pit the Thai-Buddhist kingdom against other adversaries, notably the Burmese to the West. The consolidation and settlement of Thailand's borders (historically referred to

as the Kingdom of Siam) was the result of incessant wars with its Burmese, Lao, Khmers and Malay neighbours to the West, East and South of the country.<sup>7</sup>

The four provinces of Patani, Jala, Satun and Narathiwat where the Malays of Thailand are concentrated, on the other hand, have a history of their own that is quite distinct from that of the Siamese. It should be noted that Patani in particular was a Malay Kingdom of some historical provenance as it dates back to the era of Ayudhya and was therefore in existence even before the creation of the Bangkok (Krungtheep) and the emergence of the Chakri dynasty (which rules over Thailand until today).

These Malay polities (that were Hindu-Buddhist, prior to the coming of Islam) were all part of what was known as *Patani Raya* (Greater Patani), which covered the domain of the earlier Sultanate of Patani, which was itself derived from the ancient kingdom of Langkasuka (mentioned in the Chinese texts as *Lang-Ya-Hsiu*). Contact between Patani and other Malay kingdoms such as Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis was well established, and classical Malay courtly texts such as the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* mention how these Malay kingdoms were founded by the descendants of the Langkasuka throne.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, successive Thai rulers have sought to subjugate these Malay states and bring them within the domain of the Siamese empire. In 1901 the Thai ruler King Chulalongkorn broke the peace treaty with the Malay states and launched a military campaign against them. His centralisation programme (*thesaphiban*) regrouped the seven provinces of Patani under one unit called the *Boriween chet huamuang* (Area of the Seven Provinces). Siamese administrators were appointed by the King to rule the Malay provinces directly from the royal capital of Krungtheep (Bangkok). In 1906 the seven Malay provinces were brought closer together under a single administrative unit called *Monthon Patani*.

The arrival and consolidation of British colonial rule in the South of the Malay Peninsula was the factor that eventually led to the rupture between the Malay kingdoms of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun on the one hand and their neighbours

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<sup>7</sup> D. G. E. Hall, 'A History of Southeast Asia', Macmillan Asian Histories Series, Fourth Edition. London. 1981.

Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Kedah. In 1909 that the Malay kingdoms of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis were taken over by the British colonial power with the signing of the Anglo-Siamese treaty. Despite the division created by the Anglo-Siamese treaty, the Malay kingdoms of Patani were similar to their mainland counterparts in every respect: Patani society was Islamic and Malay in character. They shared the same language, political culture, social structures, customs and values. Cross-border contact between the kingdoms remained high, despite various attempts by the British and Siamese to police the boundary between them. As Che Man (1990) has shown, this rupture between the southern Thai provinces and the northern Malay states was fundamentally political in nature, but was never truly recognised and internalised by the communities that resided in the shared border areas between the two polities.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the modern history of Southern Thailand has therefore been a history of a minority community attempting to find its place in the scheme of things and to assert its own sense of cultural, linguistic, religious and political identity against the face of assimilation and the fear of the eventual loss of identity. By the 1930s and 1940s numerous Patani-Malay nationalist organisations and movements had sprung up all over the south and by the 1960s, following Malaysia's independence from British colonial rule, these movements grew even more active.<sup>9</sup> Che Man (1990) has written extensively about the formation and development of the Malay-Muslim autonomy and resistance movements of the South such as the *Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani* (BNPP), *Barisan Revolusi Nasional* (BRN) and *Pertubuhan Perpaduan Pembebasan*

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<sup>8</sup> By far one of the best studies on the history of the Malay-Muslim provinces of Southern Thailand and the rise of Malay-Muslim nationalism there has been written by W. K. Che Man. See: W. K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*. Ateneo de Manila University Press, Manila. 1990.

<sup>9</sup> The rise of Patani-Muslim political awareness soon led to the outbreak of violence and all-out resistance against what the Patani Malays regarded as Thai colonial and hegemonic rule over the south. The 1950s witnessed the emergence of underground guerrilla movements and the spread of a mass-based insurgency in the provinces of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun. Easy access to arms and growing frustration with the machinations of Bangkok led to the rise of new secessionist and autonomy movements in the South of Thailand. In 1959 the *Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani* (BNPP- National Liberation Front of Patani) was formed by the ex-leaders of the *Gabungan Melayu Patani Raya* (GAMPAR – United Greater Patani Malays Movement) and the Patani People's Movement (PPM). Its founder was Tengku Abdul Jalal (@ Adul Na Saiburi), the ex-Deputy Leader of GAMPAR. In 1963 the *Barisan Revolusi Nasional* (BRN- National Revolutionary Front) was formed by Ustaz Abdul Karim Hassan as a result of a split within the BNPP (*Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani*). The *Pertubuhan Perpaduan Pembebasan Patani* (PULO- Patani United Liberation Organisation) was formed in 1968 (in India) by Tengku Bira Kotanila (@ Kabir Abdul Rahman)

*Patani* (PULO), and crucially he has noted that by the mid-1980s many of these Malay-Muslim autonomy movements had undergone a change from being nationalist organisations to Islamist ones that were inspired by the Islamic revolution of Iran that took place in 1979. Crucially, it was also during this period (the late 1970s to the 1980s) that the *Tablighi Jama'at* began to make its appearance both in Malaysia and in Southern Thailand.

### **III. The *Tablighi Jama'at's* arrival in Southern Thailand: The role of the Indian Muslim community and itinerant Tablighis**

Thus far there have been no studies that offer credible and verifiable accounts of the exact circumstances of the *Tabligh's* arrival and settlement in the southern provinces of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun. From our own research (Noor, 2007) we have established the date of the arrival of the *Tabligh* in the northern Malaysian state of Kelantan as being between late June/early August 1974. The men responsible for bringing the *Tabligh* to Kelantan and establishing its first markaz there were Dr. Haydar Ali and his brothers Kamil Ali and Salahuddin Ali, all of whom were Malaysian citizens but of South Asian (Pathan) origin and whose ancestors were Indian-Muslim migrants who had come to Malaysia during the time of British colonial rule. Our earlier research into the *Tabligh* movement in northern Malaysia and southern Thailand (Noor 2007) has looked at the role played by Indian Muslims in the respective societies they eventually settled in, and we have already noted the important role played by them in the economic and socio-religious life of Muslims in Kelantan and Patani.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The history of the Haydar family reads like a textbook account of the migration of the Indian Muslims to Malaya during the colonial period: Dr. Haydar's grandfather (on his mother's side), Baharam Khan, was an Indian Muslim who originally came from Northern India and migrated to British Malaya as a trader. He was born in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) in what is now Pakistan and came to Southeast Asia as a cloth trader and merchant. He first settled in Kelantan and later transferred his business activities to Narathiwat, Patani, Southern Thailand. He was well respected by the Kelantanese and Patani Malays and his position and status as a local merchant meant that he had close business links with the local community as well as some economic clout in local affairs. The fact that he conducted his business activities in both Kelantan and Patani meant that he was constantly moving between the two Malay states and had established local contact networks in both localities. Dr. Haydar's father, Fateh Muhammad bin Hillal Muhammad, was an Indian-Muslim who entered the British colonial service and served as an Inspector of the Malaysian Special Branch of the Royal British Malayan Police Force (RMPF) in the 1930s. Fateh Muhammad died after World War II and his family grave can be traced back in Multan, Pakistan. He was the first to be born in Malaysia (then British Malaya) and his job as Inspector of the Special Branch suggests that the family was well established, respected and commanded considerable authority among the Malays. It is important to note that both

Following the introduction of the Tabligh in Kelantan in 1974, Dr. Haydar Ali and his brothers undertook the task of spreading the movement across the state between 1975 to 1977. In 1977 they made their first trip to Thailand and were instrumental in establishing the Tabligh in the border town of Golok. In Golok they chose the Masjid Muhamadiyah to be the main markaz of the Tabligh and it remains the main centre of Tabligh activities until today. The Tablighi Jama'at of Golok was therefore established in 1977 by the Ali brothers and local Muslims of Golok whom they converted to the movement during their visit.

From Golok they then travelled to Jala, to spread the Tabligh there. However they discovered that the Tabligh was already established in Jala at the Kabul mosque (Masjid Kabul) in the centre of Jala town, capital of the Jala province. It was noted by them that at that time (1977) many of the first members of the Tabligh in Jala were from the small Indian Muslim community that had settled in Jala as merchants and traders, in keeping with the pattern of career choices and opportunities left to the migrant communities in the Malay states.

Thus while we cannot ascertain the exact date of the arrival of the Tabligh in Jala and Patani, it can be conclusively stated that by 1977 the Tablighi Jama'at was already present and operating in both provinces; their headquarters being the Kabul mosque of Jala and the Indian mosque (Masjid India) of Patani, respectively.

As we have noted elsewhere (Noor, 2007), the initial spread of the Tabligh across southern Thailand came at a time when tension between the Malay-Muslims of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun and the Thai security forces was at its peak: With the insurgency in full swing across the south, travel for the Tablighis was difficult and

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Dr. Haydar's grandfather's (Baharam Khan) and father's (Fateh Muhammad bin Hillal Muhammad) lives and choice of careers seemed in keeping with the racialised social order of the colonial period. Indian Muslims were generally confined to the area of trade and commerce, and quite a number of Indian Muslims from the Punjab or the Northwest Frontier Province were recruited into the police and armed forces of the British colonial government. As such neither Dr. Haydar's family or himself had much contact with the Malays who had been relegated to a more rural, agrarian-based economy in the countryside. Though they lived in the relatively under-developed state of Kelantan, they were nonetheless a thoroughly urbanised, middle-class family.

security checks were common then. The Thai army's 'Operation Ramkamhaeng' and the 'Special Anti-Terrorist Campaign' that lasted nearly seven years (between 1968 to 1975) had resulted in 385 violent armed clashes between Thai security forces and Patani militant groups. A total of 1,208 detentions and arrests were made, while 329 Patani fighters were killed. Two hundred and fifty militia camps were destroyed and 1,451 weapons were captured. But despite the scale of the counter-insurgency programmes and operations, the Patani region remained tense.<sup>11</sup>

For much of the 1980s the Tabligh carried out their activities quietly and did not court much attention. Due to the small number of Indian Muslims who had settled in towns like Jala, Golok and Patani, most of the new members who were recruited by the Tablighs were local Malays from the provinces as well. The main centres of the Tabligh were the Masjid Kabul of Jala, the Masjid India of Patani and the Masjid Muhamadiyah of Golok. Between these three centres the Tabligh established numerous small markaz, pondok schools and took over suraus along the main highways (highways 42, 410, 4157 and 4084) that connected the three provinces of Patani, Jala and Narathiwat and which served as the main transport hubs to the north of the country and southwards in the direction of Kelantan and Kedah, Malaysia.

As the insurgency began to peter out by the mid-1980s and political tension across the Thai-Malaysian border subsided, the Tabligh were allowed to further develop and consolidate their presence in the south. In time, Jala came to serve as the main centre for Tabligh activities across the southern provinces and was rivalled only by the secondmost important centre for Tabligh activities, Bangkok. The Tablighis began to hold their yearly Ijtimas (Grand Gatherings) of Tablighis from the south in Jala, and as the Ijtimas grew bigger in size and attracted more itinerant Tablighis from abroad, a bigger location was sought.

In 1990 the foundation was laid for the Masjid al-Nur, which would later become the Markaz Besar (Central Markaz/Headquarters) of the Tabligh across Thailand and the

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<sup>11</sup> In December 1975 Thai security forces killed five Patani youths, leading to the largest anti-government rallies in the history of the region that were carried out in front of the Patani central mosque. To complicate matters even further, the killing of the Patani youths sparked off protests by Malays in the neighbouring state of Kelantan as well, and prompted the leader of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), Asri Muda, to raise the matter in the Malaysian Parliament.

Southeast Asian region. (See below). Throughout the 1990s the Markaz Besar of Jala attracted itinerant Tablighi congregations from all across Thailand and further abroad, bringing together Tablighis from Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Cambodia, Burma and Vietnam; as well as South and Central Asia. During our earlier research trips to Kelantan and southern Thailand in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007 we encountered itinerant groups of Tablighis from Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan on their way there and back to their respective countries. This made the Jala Ijtimā the fourth biggest congregation of the Tablighi Jama'at worldwide, coming after the yearly Grand Ijtimas of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh; and certainly the biggest yearly gathering of Tablighis in all of Southeast Asia.

#### **IV. The *Tablighi Jama'at* network in the province of Jala: The *Markaz Besar Tabligh Masjid al-Nur, Jala***

The Markaz Besar Tabligh Masjid al-Nur of Jala is located on the outskirts of Jala town, which also happens to be the provincial capital of Jala and situated at the vital crossroads that connect the other Southern provinces of Patani, Narathiwat and Satun. Travelling south along the main highway leads to the border town of Golok, situated on the Golok river (Sungai Ko Lok) and which happens to be one of the three main border crossings to Malaysia to the South. The highway east leads to the town of Patani and then further to the southeast to the equally important towns of Narathiwat and Tak Bai, the latter of which is the second border crossing into Malaysia.

The Markaz Besar Tabligh lives up to its reputation of being the headquarters of the Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia by virtue of its size. Located in an enclosed and walled compound approximately four square kilometres wide, it comprises of the main mosque complex itself, the Masjid al-Nur, a residents wing, an office and meeting facility and a new wing that was under construction during our visit that is meant for women.

The foundations of the Masjid al-Nur were laid in 1990 and the architect responsible for the design of the mosque was the famous Haji Abdul Mukif, who was of Bangladeshi nationality and was regarded as one of the best engineers in the world – a

fact that was constantly repeated to us by the members of the Tabligh whom we met and interviewed during our stay there.

The mosque itself occupies more than half of the compound and is a large square structure built on concrete and cement foundations. The exterior of the mosque lends the impression of it being half completed, save for the dome that was designed in a modernist style, modelled on the Timurid domes of Central Asia. Despite its façade which gives the impression of it being a multi-storied complex, the interior of the mosque actually comprises of a single floor on the ground level, with a high ceiling that is at least 50 feet above ground level, held aloft by rows of reinforced concrete pillars. The simple interior design was meant to offer as much space as possible for the main floor to be used by groups of itinerant Tablighis who use the main floor as their space for worship, group discussions and teaching sessions; and also doubles as a sleeping space for the itinerant groups who do not sleep in the residences next door to the mosque. Along with the dome that is complete, the floor of the mosque – which is clad in white marble – is also the only other feature that has been completed. During our visit to the mosque<sup>12</sup>, all four major stairwells leading to the roof (which are located at the four extreme corners of the mosque), along with the walls, pillars, ceiling and roof, remained uncompleted and were exposed to the elements. The only windows that were properly installed were those that were south facing. The front of the mosque features a series of wide open arches that remain exposed to the elements as well.

During the course of our interviews there, we were informed that the total cost of the mosque complex – which includes the main mosque, the residence complex adjacent to it, the grounds and walls around the complex – incurred a cost of approximately twenty million Malaysian Ringgit. (US 5 million). The architect Abdul Mukif, who was a follower of the Tabligh during his lifetime, designed the mosque for free. Likewise all construction work was done by construction workers who were members of the Tabligh, and who worked on the construction of the markaz complex for free as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Between 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2008.



It was also pointed out to us that much of the materiel used for the construction of the mosque was donated by individuals or companies that were owned by individuals who were members of the Tabligh. The head of the security section of the markaz, Ustaz Rushdi, demonstrated this fact by giving us a tour of the basement, roof and stairwells of the mosque, where it was clear that construction had been carried out in stages and that different materials were used at different stages of the mosque's construction. Discoloration of the concrete in the stairwells, for instance, suggested that different types of concrete and bricks were used of varying quality – donated by different donors.

Due to its size the markaz complex completely dominates the part of Jala town where it is located. The size of the roof and dome also makes the building stand out against the backdrop of the rather drab and utilitarian commercial buildings located around it. Ustaz Rushdi also informed us that the roof had been designed in such a way that it could accommodate at least three helicopters and sustain the weight of such machines.<sup>13</sup>

When asked about the funding for the mosque complex, the Tabligh leaders insisted that the entire complex had been built with the support of the Tabligh network in Thailand and overseas from the time work began in 1990. Ustaz Rushdi related the story of a prince from Dubai who offered to pay for the construction to be completed in time, but who was told by the Tablighis that they would only accept his donation if he was to join the Tabligh movement and devote his entire life to the spread of the Tablighi Jama'at. The Tabligh leaders we met insisted that the mosque “belongs to all Muslims and to none of us. Anyone has the right to stay here and use the markaz as long as he upholds the Kalimah and follows the path of the Tabligh”.<sup>14</sup>

### **Organisation and management of the Markaz**

Due to the itinerant nature of the Tabligh movement, there is a constant flow of members coming in and out of the markaz. Withing the markaz itself, located on the Eastern side of the main floor, is a demarcated area marked by low-level tables and

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Cikgu Rushdi, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

carpets which is defined as the administration centre of the markaz. Flanking the eastern doorway is an area that is marked as the visitors centre (where groups of Tablighis who have just arrived from outside Jala are expected to report and to be allocated their sleeping area, provisions, etc.) and another space that is defined as the shura area, where the committee of the markaz meet.

During our stay there we were constantly being referred to the visitors area for any information we sought. All discussions and interviews were done either in the visitors area or the shura area. After Asar prayers the committee of the markaz meet to discuss the day's work and matters related to the administration of the markaz such as finances and the itineraries of the groups coming in and out of the markaz.

Most of the members of the markaz committee were Tablighis who were residents of Jala, as many of the Tablighis we met were from other provinces across Thailand. The head of communications and information (as well as logistics) was Ustaz Kamaruddin Fatani<sup>15</sup>, who was also a religious school teacher and imam in Jala.

The markaz committee is made up of senior Tablighis who reside in Jala, many of whom have jobs in the local community. The committee does not have a fixed roster of duties and functions, but during our stay there we were informed that the functions carried out by the current members of the committee include: education and dakwah, logistics and communication, food and catering, transport, health and security.<sup>16</sup>

The size of the markaz allows it to accommodate a large congregation both in the mosque complex and the open ground in front of the markaz that doubles as a car park. We were informed that during the grand Ijtima', the entire complex is able to accommodate around eight to ten thousand members of the Tabligh in all. The main problem faced by the residents however are food, transportation and sanitation facilities as the only functioning toilets were located in the residents block next to the mosque. At present there is running water in the main mosque where the residents may take their ablution before prayers, but no toilet facilities.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Cikgu Kamaruddin Fatani and members of the Masjid Shura committee, 10 and 11<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

One unique feature that we have never encountered in any of our other stays at other Tabligh centres is the presence of what appeared to be a local Tabligh security force in the markaz. Ustaz Rushdi, who was then leader of the security force for the week, informed us that this was to prevent theft, the entry of ‘strangers’ and ‘unnecessary complications’; though what the latter amounted to remained unclear. Those responsible for security in the complex walked around in typical Tablighi dress of *shalwar-khameez* with a *kepiyah* or *serban* (turban), but were also given staffs made of bamboo to carry. This was the first time we have entered a Tablighi establishment where there were Tablighis who resembled security guards, checking the entry and exit of visitors and who remained on guard all day long. During our stay there the members of this ad-hoc security force were constantly patrolling the compound and stationed at the gates. They also prevented us from photographing the building until we asked, and were given permission, to do so by Ustaz Kamaruddin Fatani. It has to be noted however that apart from the crude bamboo staffs that were issued to those in charge of security, no weapons of any kind (including farming tools such as *parangs* and *klewangs*) were to be seen – despite the availability of such tools in Jala, which remains a predominantly rural agrarian-based province.

### **Logistics, accommodation and other facilities**

The size of the markaz makes it rather difficult for the markaz’s committee to cater to all the needs of the residents, particularly the itinerant groups. As we were allocated places with the itinerant groups, we stayed in the main markaz itself and slept in the central area of the main mosque floor.

The markaz has no facilities for those occupying this space, and laundry as well as cooking facilities were not available. Due to these shortcomings, many of the itinerant Tablighis are forced to walk out of the main mosque complex and avail themselves to the small shops and businesses that operate immediately outside the markaz, beyond its walled compound. Lining the main walls outside and several rows of small shops that sell religious books (mostly Qurans and Quranic exegesis), clothes commonly used by the Tablighis (*shawlar-kahmeez*, *serban*-cloth and *sarongs*), food and beverages. Food had to be bought from outside and preferably consumed outside as

well, for the main markaz complex also lacks a functioning garbage-collection service and there was no space for cutlery or other utensils to be brought in and cleaned in the main mosque complex.

The living conditions in the residence next to the mosque are marginally less spartan, with more toilets, rudimentary bathing facilities and rooms for the Tablighis to sleep in. Sleeping conditions in the residence and the main mosque, however, were the same with the Tablighis sleeping mainly on the floor on bedding that they had brought with them.

### **Daily routine**

The daily routine at the markaz is no different from that of other Tabligh markaz and mosques we have visited and stayed at. The day begins around one hour before dawn with the Tablighis getting up and preparing for dawn prayers. Shortly after prayers are over, members either prepare breakfast or cluster into small study circles. Food and beverage for breakfast is prepared by the Tablighis themselves but there is no communal kitchen where the food is cooked. Many of the itinerant Tablighis staying in the main hall of the mosque had brought food with them or had bought the food from the shops that line the outer walls of the mosque complex. On our second day we discovered that most of the small restaurants and eating houses immediately outside the mosque were already open at that time as their owners were also members of the Tabligh community and were used to preparing food for the Tablighis at such an early hour.

The first half of the day is generally free with no classes or discussion sessions. Most of the itinerant Tablighis spend their time catching up on sleep or carrying out basic chores like washing their clothes and preparing for the next stage of their itinerant travel.

Most Tablighi-related activities take place between Zohor and Asar prayers, and after the Asar prayers are over the members cluster into bigger study and reading groups. It was noted that unlike many of the other Tablighi centres we have visited, there was a relatively higher representation of older Tablighis at this markaz. Unlike many of the

other Tablighi markaz or madrasas/pondok schools, there were no classes for children and few of the Tablighis we met and interviewed were in their teens.

The second part of the day when most Tablighi-related activities take place is between *Maghrib* and *Isha'* prayers, after which the Tablighis then cluster into discussion groups again. The discussions are led by resident teachers and preachers, many of whom were from the Southern provinces of Thailand and therefore locals. As the representation of foreign Tablighis was drastically reduced due to visa restrictions and the heightened security situation in the region, most of the discussions were local in character and content. All the discussions were conducted with Malay (Jawi) as the common language and Arabic, Urdu and other foreign languages were not used at all during our stay there.

Over the course of the three days we stayed there, the discussions that we followed centred around the following themes:

1. The importance of the rituals and practices of the Tablighis – such as the tarawikh prayers that take place after Isha prayers and well after midnight – and how they form and shape the character of the Tablighis as pious Muslims who are of stronger faith and commitment compared to other Muslims. (See appendix A) Many of the discussions also stressed the need for the Tablighis to retain their mode of dress and manners (See appendix B), with a strong emphasis on the uniformity of sartorial standards among them, so as to ensure that they remain a cohesive community that is not weakened by the vices of luxury and personal vanity.
2. The dangers of narcotics and in particular the abuse of a local herbal remedy made from a vine called *Daun Ketung*. (See appendix A) Daun Ketung has always been a popular local remedy used to cure muscle aches and pains. It is boiled in water and then served as an infusion, to be drunk lukewarm. The Tablighi preachers however pointed out that today there are many Patani youth – most of whom are Malay-Muslims – who boil the leaves and then mix them with alcohol or even cough medicine, and consume the concoction as a narcotic. It was alleged that 80 per cent of Patani Muslim youths are now

addicted to the drug, and it was also alleged that the spread of Daun Ketung abuse was indirectly the result of the policy of the Thai government to weaken the faith and morals of the Patani Muslims. Tablighi members were warned not to use Daun Ketung even for medicinal purposes, as it was a narcotic and thus considered *haram* for Muslims.

3. The planning for the next Tablighi Ijtima for Bangkok: We were informed that up to three years ago (2005) there were two major gatherings (Ijtima) of the Tabligh in Thailand, one in Bangkok and one in Jala. Since the outbreak of militant violence in the south, the Jala Ijtima has been phased out due to security reasons and the fact that foreigners are less inclined to journey to the markaz. Several discussions were held to finalise the planning and logistics for the Bangkok Ijtima, and volunteers were asked to come forward to join the various missionary groups that would be sent out of Bangkok to the rest of Thailand and Southeast Asia following the conclusion of the Bangkok Ijtima.
4. The importance of the Jawi language: Several discussions were held to discuss the importance of the Jawi language for the Malay-Muslims of the South and why every effort had to be made to ensure that the next generation of Malay-Muslims would not forget their mother tongue. This was related to the other topic of the preservation of Patani Malay cultural identity and how more work had to be done to defend and propagate the use of the Jawi language and Malay culture.
5. One lecture was held on the subject of conversion and the dangers of inter-religious mixing, with the preacher warning the Tablighis about the danger of mixed religious marriages and marriages done in civil courts. During the discussion the preacher asked the Tablighis to indicate if any of them had relatives who were married to Thai Buddhists, and then lectured them on the need to convince their Thai-Buddhist in-laws to embrace Islam; or to encourage the couples to divorce should the Buddhist spouse refuse to convert. The leitmotif of the discussion was the claim that the option of civil marriages for Muslim-Buddhist couples was part of the policy to dilute the presence of Islam in the south and to weaken the faith of Muslims further.

Apart from the group discussions that take place after *Maghrib* and *Isha'* prayers, many of the Tablighis also stayed awake up to 2 a.m. to continue their devotions and to perform non-obligatory *Terawikh* prayers. We noted that a few of the Tablighis also spent the night outside the markaz complex at the coffee shops and tea houses outside the markaz parameter, but few strayed further into the town of Jala. Likewise during our stay there we did not encounter any of the town folk of Jala who were not members of the Tabligh in the compound of the markaz.

Though the Markaz Besar has been raided several times by Thai security forces – often on the lookout for foreign Tablighis bearing non-Thai passports – during our stay there, there were no incursions by the police or army. We were also informed that there had not been any major disturbances of note since January 2008, despite the worsening security situation in the province and the fact that Jala remains the most volatile and violent of the four southern provinces.

### **Research conditions**

Compared to our other experiences of visiting and staying at other Tablighi markaz and mosques in Southeast Asia, our trip to the markaz of Jala was the most difficult and taxing. It was evident that there was much paranoia and suspicion about our presence there, and at no point were we left in private. The security presence alluded to above meant that the security personnel of the markaz were constantly present and that we were not allowed to move through any of the restricted spaces of the markaz complex (the roof, basement and stairwells) without permission from the markaz committee. We noted that none of the itinerant Tablighis ventured into these areas either.

Interviewing the members present was the most difficult, with many questions being asked to us about our presence there, our intentions, our institution of research and our nationality. In the course of the interviews and discussions one topic that allowed us to break the ice with the interviewees was the history of Patani in relation to the Malay kingdoms of Kelantan and Trengganu in Malaysia, and the early history of the kingdom of Patani-Raya and its historical origins that date back to the kingdom of

Langkasuka. It was only after demonstrating our knowledge of the ancient history of Patani that the Tablighis we met warmed up to us and were prepared to engage us in open conversation.

The mood of suspicion, however, remained with us throughout our stay and we were constantly informed that the Tablighis now had to be careful as the markaz had been ‘infiltrated’ by government agents and spies working for the Thai security forces, as well as those who were sympathetic to the Muslim insurgents of the South. For this reason many questions were asked about my previous research and visits to countries like India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco and the Lebanon. It was clear that in many of the discussions we had, we were being probed about our local knowledge of the abovementioned countries and our contacts there. Likewise there was much curiosity about the current political situation in neighbouring Malaysia and the developments in the wake of the 8 March 2008 Federal Elections. Particular attention was paid to the role of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic party (PAS) and the prospects of PAS becoming the dominant party in Malaysia.

As was the case of every other Tablighi centre we have visited, there is no news from the outside world that entered the closed space of the Tablighi markaz. No newspapers were brought in, and no radios or televisions were present anywhere in the complex. The use of mobile phones, however, has become an accepted norm and most of the Tablighis we met kept in communication with their families and friends via handphones. There were no restrictions on the use of handphones in the markaz complex.

#### **IV.b. Other Tablighi centres in Jala province: The *Masjid Kabul* of Jala.**

Prior to the establishment of the Masjid al-Nur in 1990, the Tablighis were concentrated in the other smaller mosques that are found in the town of Jala; with the exception of the Masjid Tengah in the centre of Jala that was built with funding from the Thai government. As is the case with the Tablighis in the other southern provinces of Thailand, the Tablighis of Jala province were not inclined to base their activities in any mosque or religious school that has received funding and support from the Thai state.



The Masjid Kabul of Jala is one of the oldest mosques in Jala, though nothing of the original structure remains. We enquired among the Tablighs of the Markaz Besar for photographs or documentation on the Masjid Kabul, but none was available. The present-day Masjid Kabul stands at its original site but is now entirely surrounded by modern shops and restaurants and no longer has an external compound of its own. It used to be one of the transit points and markaz for the Tabligh in Jala, but was finally abandoned due to its small size and low capacity for accommodation. The building is a modest two-levelled structure with elevated ceilings that give it a height of four stories. The two main entry points are located in the alleys inside a labyrinth of shops and restaurants, making access difficult for those who are unfamiliar with it.

As the present-day structure is simply too small to accommodate any itinerant travellers, it is no longer used by the Tablighis as one of their centres. The only activities that take place in the mosque are the regular daily prayers and non-obligatory prayers around midnight; as well as the obligatory Friday mid-day prayers. During our short visit there on the last day of our stay in Jala we were informed by local residents and shop owners that the Tabligh is no longer active in and around the vicinity of Masjid Kabul, and that it has now become a small ordinary mosque for the community.

#### **IV.c. The *Tablighi Jama'at* network in the province of Patani: The *Masjid India* of Patani.**

Patani town, which is the capital of Patani province, is situated close to the coast of the Gulf of Thailand and is connected to the north, west and south of the country via highways 42, 43 and 410 respectively. The historical importance of Patani lies in the fact that it was the capital of the Malay-Muslim kingdom of Patani-Raya, and historical records date its existence at least back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as chronicled in the Malay courtly text, the *Hikayat Patani*.

Patani's strategic location at the mouth of the Patani river and its proximity to the provinces of Jala, Narathiwat, Songkla and the Malay states of Kelantan, Kedah and Trengganu makes it one of the most accessible settlements in present-day southern

Thailand and historically it has been one of the most important centres of Malay-Muslim culture and learning. Che Man (1990)<sup>17</sup> has noted the long historical standing of Patani as both a political and cultural centre whose influence had spread all across southern Thailand and northern Malaysia, a factor that has also been noted by Fatimi (1963)<sup>18</sup> in his study of the early Islamisation process of the Malay world where Patani had played an important role in the spread of Islam. Alongside Kelantan (and to a lesser extent Trengganu), Patani ranks as the most important centre of Islamic learning where scholars from all over the archipelago had come to learn and teach alongside their Patani counterparts and contemporaries, as noted by Manning (1974), Winzeler (1975) and Hassan (1986).<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that both Patani and Kelantan have vied for the coveted title of being the '*serambi mekah*' (Porce of Mecca) on the Malayan Peninsula.

Patani's distance from the Thai capital of Bangkok and its proximity to the Malay kingdoms of the South meant that historically the kingdom of Patani has focused more on maintaining its close cultural, linguistic and economic links with the Malay kingdoms rather than its Thai neighbours; a factor made all the more pertinent considering the problematic relationship between the Malay-Muslims and the Thai-Buddhists of the Siamese kingdom. Patani's coastal location also meant that it served as an accessible entrepot for foreign trade and was very much linked to the coastal trading networks along the eastern coast of the Peninsula. For this reason Patani society was more cosmopolitan, being host to many other migrant communities who had come to settle there.

As in the case of the Malay kingdom of Kelantan to the south, Patani was also host to a number of migrant Muslim communities that originated from the Indian subcontinent. During the colonial era many Indian Muslims had been brought to the

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<sup>17</sup> Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> Fatimi, S. Q., *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963.

<sup>19</sup> See: Muhammad Kamal Hassan, 'Some Dimensions of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia', in Taufik Abdullah and Sharon Siddique (eds.), *Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 1986; Manning Nash, *Peasant Citizens: Politics, Religion and Modernisation in Kelantan, Malaysia*, Ohio University, Centre for International Studies, Southeast Asia Series Monograph No. 31, 1974 and Robert L. Winzeler, 'Traditional Islamic Schools in Kelantan', *JMBRAS*, 48(1) (1975):

Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca to serve in the British colonial army or as lower functionaries of the civil service. A considerable number of Indian Muslims had also come as independent traders to ply their trade in gold, spices and cloth in the Straits Settlements as well as the independent Malay states. Unlike the Indian migrant labourers who were brought in large numbers by the British from Southern India to work in the tea plantations and on the railway lines of British Malaya (most of whom were of Tamil-Hindu origin), many of the Indian Muslims who came to British Malaya originated from northern India and were of Punjabi, Pathan or Kashmiri stock. Unlike the Tamil labourers who were bound by their contractual obligations to British plantation owners, the Indian Muslims who set up businesses all over British Malaya were financially independent and could also rely on capital back in India. Some of them ventured further afield to the more independent Malay states like Kelantan and Patani, before the later was colonised by the Thais following the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909.

This accounts for the lingering presence of Muslims of north Indian origin who still reside in Patani and the other southern provinces of Thailand today. They are commonly referred to as 'orang Patan' (Pathans) though not all of them originated from that part of northern India which today straddles the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. In Patani the local laws and regulations on commerce dictated that non-Patani Malays could not trade in gold, which remained under the monopoly of the Malay community and was a highly regulated (and taxed) enterprise. As a result many of the Indian Muslims who had settled in Patani (like their counterparts in Kelantan to the south) traded in cloth and spices that were brought from India via Penang and Singapore.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Indian Muslim community in Patani served as middlemen and traders who dominated much of the cloth and spice business in Patani province. Many of them were also married to local Malay women, and as such helped to create the Creole Indian *Peranakan* community. In Patani town the community was concentrated around the district of Batu Tiga, and it was here that they built their own mosque, the *Masjid India Patani*.

The Masjid India Patani presently sits on the banks of the Patani river and is flanked by a small park as well as a string of riverside houses. Today the community that resides in its vicinity are predominantly Malay, and few traces of the former Indian Muslim *peranakan* community remain. Likewise many of the older wood and timber houses that were built in a hybrid Indian-Malay style are no longer there, as much of Patani has been reconstructed to suit the tastes and needs of the modern commercial capital that it has become. Only faint traces of the former Indian *peranakan* community remain in the architecture of the Masjid India Patani, with Indian-inspired stone columns flanking its outer parameter and a ribbed dome (*kubah*) that bears some similarity to the domes of Indian mosques during the Moghul era. It has to be noted however that the entire mosque complex has been rebuilt several times and no visual records exist of what it looked like when it was first built.

The Masjid India Patani,<sup>20</sup> we were informed, was built before the Second World War and is still seen as the main centre of Tabligh activities in Patani. However during our earlier research trips to Patani, we have noted that no significant presence of Tablighis at the most was to be found. The mosque has never been used as a centre of teaching and so does not double as a *pondok* or *madrasa* school, and during all our previous visits has never hosted any itinerant Tabligh group. As such it is doubtful whether it can be classified as one of the *markaz* of the Tabligh in the Patani province.

There are two possible reasons that may account for the Masjid India Patani no longer being used as a Tablighi centre in Patani town:

Firstly, since the creation of the Markaz Besar based at the Masjid al-Nur in Jala, most of the Tabligh-related activities in the south have been moved there. The sheer size of the Jala markaz, which dwarfs the Masjid Indian Patani by comparison, means that larger gatherings can be held in Jala with fewer logistical problems.

Secondly, since 2004 the security situation in southern Thailand has deteriorated to such an extent that the Tabligh – like other Islamist groups in the region – have been

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<sup>20</sup> During our earlier visits to the mosque in Patani we were informed that the mosque had been rebuilt and renamed several times. Local informants we interviewed were not certain of the actual date of its construction, though many stated that it was built before the Second World War. Confusion also remains over its names, with three names being used at times: *Masjid Hidayatullah*, *Masjid Pakistan* and *Masjid India*. The most common named used today, however, is the Masjid India of Patani.

forced to keep a lower profile. The location of the Masjid India Patani at the very centre of Patani town and the relatively exposed nature of the mosque complex (with an open park and its western front facing the bank of the Patani river) means that it would be practically impossible to conduct any Tabligh-related activities in peace and quiet.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore as Patani remains the most important town among the four Malay-Muslim provinces of the south, the presence of Thai security forces was evident, and road blocks and police checks have become routine in the town. The heightened climate of fear and tension made it increasingly difficult for Tablighis to move around Patani, and presumably also accounts for their limited presence in the town today.

The Masjid India Patani may have served as one of the stops for itinerant Tablighis who used to move freely across the four southern provinces in the past, but today serves only as a regular mosque that caters to the needs of the local community of worshipers.

#### **IV.d. The *Tablighi Jama'at* network in Narathiwat: The *Markaz Masjid Muhamadiyah* of Golok**

The activities of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in the province of Narathiwat are centred at the Masjid Muhamadiyah, which serves as the main markaz of the Tabligh in the area. As was noted earlier, the Tabligh was first introduced to Golok in 1977 by the same family of Indian Muslims who had introduced the Tabligh to the neighbouring state of Kelantan in Malaysia, earlier in 1974. In Golok they met with local Muslims who helped them take over the Masjid Muhamadiyah and turn it into the first markaz of the Tabligh in the town. A second markaz, the Masjid Dua Tabligh, was set up in

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<sup>21</sup> Our local informant, Cikgu Meng Sulaiman, informed us that many of the local Muslims who used the mosque were complaining that it no longer suited their needs. The compound was simply too small to accommodate a large number of people for Friday *Jama'ah* prayers; the location was no longer suitable due to the closeness of the main road and the public park next door. Local Muslims whom we met informed us that they were not happy with the fact that public entertainments were often held at the park nearby. During our visit, a huge crowd had gathered at the park the next day to celebrate the opening of a branch of the International Red Cross, and a public concert was held. A week earlier a similar concert was held at another park in the town of Songkla to the north, but the festivities were disrupted when an explosive device was detonated by local insurgents, resulting in several people being injured. As such the mood in Patani town was tense when we were there, for many people we interviewed feared that a similar bomb attack may take place during the free public concert in Patani as well.

2001 by local Muslims of Golok who were already members of the Tabligh by then. It continues to function but only in a secondary capacity to the Markaz Masjid Muhamadiyah.

Compared to Patani, the Tabligh are more active and visible in Golok for a number of reasons. Golok remains an unattractive border-crossing town with a somewhat dubious reputation on both sides of the Thai-Malaysian border. The lack of effective security controls in Golok may account for why the Tabligh have been able to operate more easily there, for this also applies to other extra-legal (and even illegal) activities that include gambling dens, brothels and unlicensed night-clubs and massage parlours. On the Malaysian side it is known as a fleshpot that caters to an almost-exclusively male clientele from Malaysia and Singapore. The town is dotted with brothels that operate openly, despite the fact that prostitution is illegal in Thailand. It also has the reputation as the centre for operations for numerous drugs and smuggling gangs, and its lawless character is reflected in the environment itself.

Though Golok has historically been a Malay-Muslim dominated town, it also has the reputation of being the centre of criminal activity and was also one of the main centres of communist activity that was used by the banned Malayan Communist party (MCP) during the Emergency period between 1948 to 1960. Today its population has become more mixed and cosmopolitan thanks to the influx of Thai-Buddhist migrants from the north of Thailand who have re-settled there. The proximity of the two communities – Thai-Buddhist and Malay-Muslim – has been a cause of some tension since the escalation of violence from 2004.

It is against this context of a divided township with a plural urban community that the Tabligh set up their first markaz in 1977. Not much is known about the original Masjid Muhamadiyah itself and during our earlier visits (in 2005 and 2007) none of the members of the mosque committee could provide us with the exact date of the mosque's construction. The mosque itself has not changed since our first visit and no extension or refurbishment work has been done to it. The Markaz Masjid Muhamadiyah is set in an enclosed compound surrounded by medium-height brick walls, and located close to the Golok river. The mosque itself sits at the centre of the compound, flanked by a multi-story dormitory that houses only male students, as well

as classrooms. In the compound of the madrasah-mosque we also encountered a considerable number of female students (though all the female students we met were very young, certainly less than 10 years of age). These female students were part of the study and play-group, and did not reside in the dormitory themselves.

There is nothing about the architectural design of the mosque that suggests any connections to the Tablighi Jama'at. It is a large rectangular structure with a sloping dome and minaret, built in a utilitarian style to serve the purpose of a house of worship. Unlike the Masjid India Patani, the style is nondescript and modern. The madrasah-mosque complex can be entered via both the front main entrance as well as the rear entrance, which leads out into a small road flanked by sundry shops, local coffee houses and automobile workshops. Access in and out of the complex is easy, and there was constant movement of young *tablighs* who were leaving the complex to buy food or make phone calls at the stalls nearby. We also noted that along both streets that flank the main entry lanes into the mosque were massage parlours that presumably serve as brothels as well. But this was not an issue for the members of the Tabligh who reside in the mosque complex as interaction between them and the Thai-Buddhist locals was kept at a minimum. During our brief stay at the mosque we did not see any Thai-Buddhists entering the mosque complex for any reason.

Unlike the Masjid India of Patani, the Masjid Muhamadiyah, by virtue of the closed compound within which it sits, offers some degree of security and privacy for those who use it. The other crucial difference is that it does serve as a proper *markaz* where itinerant Tablighis can come to stop and rest along their journey; and it also serves as a *madrassa* school where Muslim children (all of whom come from families linked to the Tabligh) are given extra religious classes. The *madrassa* provides rudimentary religious education to train the boys to become *hafiz*. Classes are held in the mosque itself, in typical *Tabligh* fashion: Groups of boys cluster around a teacher (*mudir/ustaz*) who supervises their oral recitation of the *Qur'an*. At the mosque we were given samples of *Tabligh* material translated into the Thai language.

As with the case of their counterparts in Jala and neighbouring Malaysia, the young *tablighs* in the *markaz*-mosque were dressed in South Asian garb that set them apart from the other local Thais and non-Tabligh Malays. At the time of our first visit in

2005 the student body was estimated to be around one hundred boys in all. Female students were allowed to come to the madrasa to join in the *Qur'an* reading sessions, but were not allowed to stay in the madrasa's dormitory. During our recent visit (May 2008) the number of students seem to remain the same, with no changes to the daily routine or teaching practices carried out at the markaz-madrasa.

The only perceptible difference we noted during our recent visit was the absence of foreign (non-Thai) Tablighs. Compared to our visits in 2005 and 2007, all the members and students of the Tabligh community we met this time were Thai citizens.<sup>22</sup> We were informed that this year (2008) the number of itinerant groups from across the region has dwindled considerably due to security reasons. We were also informed that fewer Tablighs from Malaysia have made it to Golok as well, and again this was explained to us as a result of the deteriorating security conditions in southern Thailand and travel warnings issued to Malaysians by the Malaysian government.

## **VI. The political economy of the *Tablighi Jama'at* network in Southern Thailand: Capital, Funding and Logistical Support**

It can be concluded that the *Tablighi Jama'at* network in southern Thailand remains as active today as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, with a gradual increase in terms of its membership and the expansion of its supporter network as well. Despite the deteriorating security condition in the four southern provinces, none of the Tabligh mosques, *markaz* and/or *madrasas* have been shut down or forced to close due to the decline of members and supporters.<sup>23</sup> If anything, the continued development of the

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<sup>22</sup> During our earlier visit in 2005 most of the students we met at the Markaz Masjid Muhamadiyah were local boys from Patani, though we also met with a group of Indonesian *tablighs* (6 in all) who were between the ages of 17 to 19. Some were from the Jakarta branch of the *Tabligh* (possibly from their *markaz* at Masjid Kebun Jeruk in Central Jakarta) and all had come to spend the night in order to have their passports stamped at the local immigration centre on the Golok river border crossing. (The Indonesian *tablighs* probably had no right to remain in Thailand and they were taking advantage of the regular corruption at the immigration check-point to have their passports stamped and visas to Thailand extended.) The Indonesian *tablighs* had arrived from the Markaz Besar at Jala, and that evening it was discovered that the *markaz* was raided by Thai police and security personnel who demanded passports of all foreigners. The Indonesian *tablighs* were worried about their presence in Thailand and warned us not to proceed to Jala. They also informed us of the coming *iztimak* (grand assembly) of all the *tablighs* of Southeast Asia, to be held at the Pesantren Temboro in Magetan, East Java. See: Noor, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> There have, however, been an increase in the number of unannounced police raids and checks on the Tabligh *markaz* and mosques, including the *Markaz Besar* of Jala, since 2004, as we have noted above.



*Markaz Besar Masjid al-Nur* of Jala would suggest that the numbers of the Tabligh are increasing and that they are still capable of funding and sustaining such grand projects which includes the construction of the biggest Tablighi markaz in Southeast Asia.

It is, however, difficult to ascertain how the Tabligh has managed to sustain its activities on such a scale considering the apparent poverty of its members and the lack of state funding. Unlike Malaysia or Indonesia where the Tabligh were – during the 1980s at least – tolerated and in some cases even encouraged and supported by the respective governments of the two Muslim-majority countries, the Tabligh in Thailand has never been officially endorsed by the Thai state. Since 2004, with the increase in violence and renewal of hostilities between the Thai security forces and the local insurgents of Patani, the stand of the Thai government has been the opposite: to view the Tabligh with some degree of suspicion as an unknown pseudo-political religious organisation that may or may not be indirectly linked to the insurgency itself. This is one of the reasons why long-term field research with the Tabligh, employing the methodology of participant observation, has become increasingly difficult, particularly for foreign scholars.

Perhaps the most important question that remains unanswered is how the Tabligh funds its activities in Thailand. The question of funding remains one of the unanswered conundrums surrounding the Tabligh movement as it is in this area that transparency is lacking the most. The Tabligh rarely keep records of their finances (particularly in the smaller *markaz* and mosques) and in many cases the funding is direct, with materiel donations and cash transfers being made by hand.<sup>24</sup>

Though no comprehensive study has been conducted on the funding methods of the Tabligh in Thailand (or any other part of Southeast Asia, for that matter), we may

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During our earlier research trips to the region the *Markaz Besar* was raided several times by Thai police and security personnel on the lookout for foreigners.

<sup>24</sup> See: Noor, 2003. During the course of our fieldwork on the Tabligh in Indonesia, for instance, we were given the opportunity to live with the Tabligh in their markaz in Jakarta and to travel with them to the smaller markaz and mosques run by the Tabligh in Central Java (Jogjakarta and Surakarta). These trips were funded by the Tabligh themselves, with bus tickets being provided gratis to the members of the itinerant groups. When asked about the funding for these bus tickets and other transport costs, we were informed that they were donated freely to the Tabligh by businessmen who ran transport companies who were also members of the Tabligh. Likewise food at the markaz we stayed in was provided gratis, by rice-stall owners and restaurant owners who were members of the Tabligh.

come to some tentative conclusions based on anecdotal evidence and our observations made during our field research there. In our interviews the *markaz* committee members of the Markaz Besar Jala insisted that all of the funding for the Markaz Besar was collected from local donations, a claim that can be supported by reference to what we saw during our stay at the *markaz* itself. (i.e. the haphazard manner of construction and the myriad of building/construction materials used that seem to suggest a number of different donors and sources.)

At the beginning the Tabligh was not forced to engage itself in any major development project that would have incurred high costs: Most of their early centres were local mosques and *madrasas* that were taken over by the Tablighis, and thus not purpose-built: The Masjid India of Patani, was established, as we have noted above, by the Indian Muslim community of Patani and was meant to serve as the mosque for the Indian Muslims of the town. Even then it should be noted that the original structure of the Masjid India Patani was completed before the Second World War and thus pre-dates the arrival of the Tablighi Jama'at by several decades. The same applies to the Masjid Muhamadiyah of Golok and the Masjid Kabul of Jala, both of which were also built by the local Muslim communities of the respective towns and were meant to serve as mosques for the local Muslim communities. It was only much later that these mosques were taken over by the Tablighi Jama'at and used for their own purposes.

Thus the only purpose-built centre for the Tabligh is the *Markaz Besar* of Jala, that was built entirely by the Tablighi Jama'at to serve as their main centre of activities in the region. The Tablighis we met denied receiving any Thai government funding or funding from foreign Muslim governments, as noted above. Instead they insist that all funding has been local, and the most common method of collecting funds is to host a local village-level *kenduri* or feast, where members of the local village community gather for a communal feast while also donating funds.

No study has been done on practice of hosting such village-wide feasts in the region thus far, but it should also be noted here that such practices are not uncommon in the Malay community. During our stay in Patani and Jala we also visited a number of local religious *pondok* schools that were not linked in any way to the Tablighi Jama'at

and were not recipients of state funding either. We noted that funding for the construction of these *pondok* schools (some with modern facilities like dormitories and libraries) also came from the local Malay-Muslim community, collected through the same method of hosting village-wide feasts.<sup>25</sup> The fact that many of the local religious schools and mosques in the southern provinces have been built and continue to be run on the basis of local donations and voluntary work may lead us to conclude that the Tabligh's claims to be an entirely self-sustaining movement is not as far-fetched as some might think.

#### **V. The *Tablighi Jama'at* network in Southern Thailand: Observations on the current situation and context.**

Overall, as mentioned above, fieldwork and research in the Southern Thai provinces of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat and Satun has become increasingly difficult over the years. Compared to our earlier trips to Patani and the other southern provinces in 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2006, this was the most difficult research trip carried out so far. The deteriorating security conditions in the southern provinces entails a higher number of routine security checks, road blocks and a heightened sense of paranoia among those whom we interviewed. On the road to Patani alone we encountered 34 road blocks and during the course of our field research was stopped and questioned by local Thai security forces four times.

Furthermore it was evident during our stay in the southern provinces that travelling outside the major towns of Patani, Jala, Narathiwat, Tak Bai and Go Lok has become increasingly difficult when much of the violence related to the insurgency movement

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<sup>25</sup> An example of such a non-Tabligh and non-state *pondok* school would be the *Ma'ahad Muasasah Asaqafatul Islamiyah Pondok Ponbing*, near Pa Na Re (Panarek). Established in 2004 and founded by the late Tuan Guru Abdul Rahman Ahmad, the *pondok* of Ponbing covered an area of thirty square acres, that was entirely donated by the local Muslim community and thus classified as *waqaf* land. At present the school hosts around two thousand students, both boys and girls, who permanently reside in the *pondoks* in the walled school compound. During our visit the teachers of the school showed us two new additions to the school that were due to be completed by the end of 2008: a new central mosque building and a new block of classes in a four-story concrete and brick structure; all of which was estimated to cost around four million Malaysian Ringgit (one million US dollars). When asked how the school board was able to pay for such construction work, we were informed that the building material and the construction work was given free by the local community, and that four feasts (*kenduris*) were held in 2007 and early 2008 to collect donations from the local villagers who lived in the area. Thus far half of the funding has been accounted for and the teachers were confident that by hosting a few more of such feasts the rest of the costs of construction would be covered as well, to meet the target of completing the work by the end of 2008.

is confined to the countryside. We were constantly moved from house to house by our local handlers, and only managed to spend two nights at the Markaz Besar Jala. Our local handlers were also compelled to seek 'clearance' from local contacts based in the villages as we moved from village to village, to ensure that we would not encounter any problems as we moved across the region.

It was noted during our brief stay in the south that there were no foreign (i.e. Western) tourists to be seen at all, as the movement of itinerant backpackers and hitch-hikers (who used to ply the main highway between the north leading to the Malaysian border state of Kelantan) has dropped to practically zero. The absence of outsiders and tourists meant that as a foreign researcher it was difficult to conceal our identity or remain anonymous for long at any single place. This in turn proved to be a cause of worry for our contacts and handlers, who were worried for our safety and whom were constantly in contact with their local village communities, to ensure the latter that we were there for purely research purposes.

Nonetheless we were able to make the following observations of the Tablighi network in the Southern provinces during the course of our stay there:

- The Tablighi Jama'at network is still fully functional and remains active despite the increased security situation in the south. Although increased visa restrictions and monitoring of foreigners has become the norm, this has not deterred local Tablighis from moving between the four southern provinces and making the regular trip to the other centre of Tabligh activity in Bangkok. Compared to our earlier observations made during our earlier fieldtrips to the region however, there has been a marked decrease in the number of foreign Tablighis from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia) in the various Tablighi markaz in the southern provinces. As was told to us, as a result of these increased security measures the Tablighis have decided to focus much of their dakwah activities further north, now using the Tablighi markaz of Bangkok as the main centre for their missionary activities across Thailand and the rest of Southeast and South Asia. Whether this will have an impact on the standing and importance of the

Markaz Besar Jala, which has been the primary centre of Tabligh activities throughout the 1990s, has yet to be seen.

- In terms of their daily religious praxis and normative behaviour, the Tabligh community in the southern provinces of Thailand do not differ in any significant manner from the Tablighis elsewhere in the region, or the world for that matter. Our brief stay at the Markaz Besar of Jala and the markaz of Golok (see above) showed that in terms of their daily rituals and work patterns, the Tablighis of Patani, Jala and Narathiwat have not developed any norms of behaviour, rules of conduct or Tablighi-related activities that differ from those of the rest of the Tablighi community worldwide.
- Although there has been no proven link between the Tablighi Jama'at and the insurgency movement in Southern Thailand, it was clear that many of the Tablighis we met (particularly at the Markaz Besar Jala) were sympathetic to the cause and struggle of the Malay-Muslim insurgents, supporting the view that this is a popular insurgency that enjoys the broader support of the Malay-Muslim populace in the South and is therefore not solely confined to the insurgents themselves. As expected, there was no overt demonstration of support for the insurgency on the part of the Tablighis, though it has to be noted that in terms of the discussions and interviews we participated in during our stay at the various mosques and markaz, the tone, form and content of the Tablighis' discourse remains conservative and literalist, as is the norm. (See appendix A, B) Though no overt political speeches and discussions were held, some of the themes of the discussions were related indirectly to questions about the future of Islam and Malay-Muslim identity in the south, the conduct of governance by the central government of Bangkok, and concerns raised about Thai-Buddhist cultural and political hegemony in the southern provinces. During our interview with Wan Kadir Che Man, leader of the BERSATU alliance of Patani autonomy movements, however, he did not rule

out the possibility that the Tabligh membership across southern Thailand has been infiltrated by both insurgents and Thai security agents.<sup>26</sup>

- Unlike their counterparts in the other countries of Southeast Asia, the Tablighis of Thailand do not have a political party or organisation that they can be linked with or lend their support to. (Compared to the Tablighis of Kelantan, for instance, who were openly supporting the Malaysian Islamic party PAS during the election campaign of March 2008.) As such the Tablighis of Southern Thailand remain a largely societal-based movement with no direct access to the political system, political representation or political clout. Thus far no attempts have been made by any of the mainstream Thai political parties to woo the Tablighis as a community or political constituency to win their support. (Despite the fact that the Thai Democratic Party was once strong in the south and regarded the southern provinces as their vote bank.)
- As expected, the Tablighis of Southern Thailand are also closely-connected to their counterparts in neighbouring countries and many of the local Tablighis we met in Patani, Jala and Go Lok were from extended families who had relations with Malay-Muslims from the northern Malaysian states of Kelantan

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Wan Kadir Che Man, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2008. Che Man noted that “I don’t know if the Tabligh are directly involved (in the insurgency), but because they move all the time they can be a strong support network. I know that there are certainly many militant sympathisers with them. But the Tabligh will not come out openly to support the insurgents as they are under watch by the Thais. The Thai government cannot ban the group because they are too big, but they are infiltrating the group with their own spies too, so be careful with who you speak to when you are with them. If you show pro-Patani sympathies, both sides will take note. So far the Tabligh have chosen to operate mainly in their markaz in Jala and Golok. They also control the Masjid India in Patani and the Masjid Kabul in Jala. At the markaz in Jala there are Tabligh members who come from all over the world, with many coming from Malaysia, Indonesia and abroad too. But as you saw the security there is very tight inside and outside. The Tablighs in the markaz are afraid of spies so they don’t welcome outsiders anymore and the Thai police are watching the entry and exit of those who go there for whatever reason. So obviously the Tabligh have to keep a low profile and I don’t think they would act openly or show support to the insurgents openly either. The main problem with the Tabligh is that they are conservative and fundamentalist, so ideologically they would support the insurgents struggle as they see it as a religious conflict. But they are out of touch with the local Malays who do not see this as a religious war, so in that respect they don’t command popular support and cannot give manpower support either. What they can do, however is offer logistical and financial support because the Tabligh are good at collecting money through donations at their mosques and markaz. Because nobody ever talks about their financing, we don’t know how rich they are and how much money they have. But even if they do offer financial assistance, this has to be done by hand and through face-to-face meetings. There is never any exchange of funds through direct bank transfers etc. as this can be detected and monitored easily, then stopped.”

and Trengganu. During our stay at the Markaz Besar of Jala, for instance, we met with several Tablighis from Jala and Patani who had returned from Malaysia, after attending the funeral of one of the notable religious teachers of Trengganu – Tuan Guru Abdul Rahman Ahmad, founder of the Pondok Darul Salam of Kuala Ibai, Trengganu – who was also related to the Malays of Patani and who had founded the Ma’ahad Muasasah Asaqafatul Islamiyah Pondok Pok Bing at Panarek (Pa Na Re), Patani. Thus it was clear that the strong bond between the Tablighis of Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia was founded on both collaborative networks as well as closely-knit family bonds and marriage ties.

## **Appendix A.**

### **Summary of a group discussion after *maghrib* prayers led by Ustaz Meng (Sulaiman) Abdullah, Markaz Besar Jala.**

(The discussion was really a preacher-led teaching session that began immediately after *maghrib* prayers and took the form of a long question-and-answer session where questions were put forward by members of the Tabligh to the leader of the group. The answers that were given were generally long, but no textual references were made. Some members took down notes of the discussion for their personal record, but there were no recordings made for the group as a whole.)

Question: What is the importance of *tarawikh* prayers and is it necessary for Muslims to stay up at night to perform *tarawikh* prayers?

Answer: *Tarawikh* prayers are not obligatory (*wajib*) but they are part of the *sunnah* (established customs) laid down by the Prophet Muhammad and that is why we, as members of the *ahli sunnah*, follow them as well.

It is recorded in one of the hadith that has been passed down by Aishah, wife of the beloved Prophet Muhammad himself. According to the hadith, the Prophet stayed awake every night to perform prayers, even when everyone else was asleep. All the *sahaba* were asleep, and even Aishah was asleep at the time.

Aishah related the story of how, one night, she was tired and wanted to go to sleep early. The Prophet was by her side and the Prophet let her fall asleep first. Then in the middle of the night, Aishah woke up but it was dark in the house. She looked around her, and her hand reached out into the darkness until she touched the robe of the



Prophet. She felt him standing next to her, and could hear him praying silently, standing alone.

Aishah then fell asleep but later woke up again. In the darkness she looked for the Prophet and again she reached out to touch him. Again her hand touched his robe and she found him standing next to her, praying silently.

After that Aishah fell asleep again, and again she woke up. She reached out to touch the Prophet and again she felt him standing next to her. His feet were wet with his tears for he had been praying silently for the safety of the Sahaba and all the Muslims of the community. So strong was his faith that the Prophet hardly slept, and he kept awake all night, every night, to pray for others while the others were asleep.

This is our model. Our Prophet has shown that this is how the real Muslim, he who upholds the Kalimah and who loves Allah almighty with all his heart, should be. Why? Because sleep is for the weak and sleep is temptation. When we let ourselves sleep who are we obeying? Are we obeying Allah almighty? Does Allah tell us to sleep? Did he make this world, this universe, for us to sleep in?

No, Allah almighty made the world for us to wonder in amazement at this greatness and his magnificence. Every waking minute we see the greatness of Allah almighty in everything around us. In the daytime we see the greatness of Allah almighty in the sun, and we see how the sun's rays enrich the earth and give us food, water in abundance. At night we see the moon and we see how Allah almighty has given us the bright moon so that we do not get lost in the dark, or lose our way.

Everything around us tells us that all of this came from Allah almighty; the sun, the moon, the woods, the hills, the oceans. And so it is only right for us to show our love and devotion to Allah almighty by thanking him, constantly, every minute of our lives. That is when we have taqwa, that is when we are khusuq.

But if we just follow our bodily instincts, then we become tired and stubborn. Our bodies are for us to use, and we should not let our bodies use us. Who governs your body? Do you govern your body or does your body govern you?

If you let your body govern you, then imagine the worst that can happen: You will grow fat and lazy, because that is what the body wants. The body says ‘feed me, feed me, feed me’, all the time, like a child that is spoilt.

Then your body will say ‘buy me clothes and jewels so that I look beautiful’; and then you will waste your time and money on things that are useless, like expensive clothes and expensive shoes and expensive sun glasses. Do you need that? Did the Prophet wear expensive clothes? Did he wear expensive shoes?

Then your body will lull you to sleep. Your body will say ‘I am tired, lets go to sleep. Lets sleep for a while and then we can work.’

But if you start sleeping then it will become a bad habit, like drugs, like alcohol. Then you sleep more and more. First you sleep for an hour, then two, then three. In the end you will spend all day long asleep. You will forget your prayers, your duties, your obligations.

And once you have forgotten all this, what will you forget? What have you forgotten? You would have forgotten Allah almighty who created you to remember him in the first place!

That is why, dear brothers, we must never let our bodies rule us, but we must rule over our bodies. We were created here to worship our God and our bodies are the tools to do that. How do we show our love for God? By working, working, working all the time; just like our beloved Prophet who worked until he died.

Did the Prophet Muhammad have a holiday? Did he go on vacation? Did he ever say to any of his sahaba “I want to rest today, you take over from me for a day”? Never! The burden was so heavy, so great on him and he carried it alone. He never gave up, never stopped, never rested even when it was so hard for him.

That is our model. If our Prophet could have done so much, sacrifice so much, worked so hard to bring the light of Islam to the world, then we should be ashamed of ourselves. I am ashamed of myself, because I should have started sooner on the path of the Kalimah. Allah almighty, please forgive us for not doing enough; please Allah let us have this chance to show our love to you, our devotion to you; please Allah almighty do not let us stray, or become weak, or let us be tempted by our weaknesses.

When your body tells you it is time to sleep, you must fight! That is Shaitan, speaking to you through your body! You think you are tired, but it is Shaitan who wants to weaken your faith, do you see? What is Shaitan? Shaitan is to be hard-headed, stubborn, arrogant, lazy, weak, selfish.

When we see our brothers who want to sleep, to run away, to hide in the corner when we are all working and praying, we must admonish him. Go to him and say to him: “Hey you! Get up and stop being lazy. It is night so get up, don’t sleep. Let us pray together and perform our *tarawikh* prayers until God tells us it is time to rest. Otherwise we do not stop, because we must put Allah almighty before us.”

Who is more important? You are important? No! Allah almighty is important! What are you? Did you make this world, this universe? Who in this group can make a sun or a moon? Can you make the rice grow faster? Can you stop the rain from falling? But if Allah almighty wants to end the world right now, he simply has to say “end” and it will be. So who are you? We are nothing! We are here to walk in the path of the *Kalimah*, may Allah accept our love and devotion and may we enter into the company of the Prophet and the truly pious Muslims in the hereafter. Amin.

When we perform *Tarawikh* prayers, our bodies may be tired but we grow stronger and stronger, because we have a new power in our bodies. It doesn’t come from food or vitamins, but it comes from faith (*iman*) that is strong. With strong faith we can do anything and Muslims will be strong, the strongest.

When we have *iman* and our *taqwa* is true and pure, Allah almighty himself will grant us his power and then we can achieve wonders. All over the country we can walk, and join our brothers in bring Islam to others. You think so? You can see it every year, when we travel from Bangkok to the rest of the country. Is there any place in this country we cannot go? Is there any place in the world that we cannot go?

What is driving us, what is giving us this energy? Is it because we sleep at night that we can walk in the morning? No, beloved brothers, it is Allah almighty that has given us this super power (*kuasa istimewa*). Allah is moving us, giving us strength and faith in our hearts, to make us brave and strong; because Allah almighty knows how much we love him.

If you look around us you can see how all the others are falling. Everywhere there are social problems: drugs, prostitutes, theft, gambling, sex. These are all the signs of weakness, of Shaitan taking over the bodies of people.

Those who drink, smoke, go to gambling dens, massage parlours, concerts, cinemas, brothels: they have all fallen. They have no faith because they have not received the light (sinaran Nur) in their hearts, because they have turned away from Islam. Or if they are Muslims, then they have left the path of the *Kalimah*.

But when the day comes for them to die, then they will panic and they will repent. "Oh no, it is too late, I am going to die now" they will say. "Oh Allah, forgive me, give me a second chance" they will say. But no, it is too late.

That is why we must never show weakness, and never give in to weakness. How can we let even one night pass without us performing *tarawikh* prayers? Our Prophet has shown the example, this is the way for us.

When we fail, then our bodies will become corrupt, and that is what is happening to so many Muslims here around us. Our young Muslims don't know how to read the Quran, some don't even know how to pray!

Then they ride motorbikes, go to clubs, have bike races, and do drugs. So many of them drink *Daun Ketung* with medicine, but it makes them crazy. It is a drug, like heroin, like cocaine, like marijuana. So for that reason don't ever think of taking that. *Daun Ketung* is not a medicine. If you want a medicine go to the doctor, and pray for Allah's guidance and help.

*Daun Ketung* cannot help you, and no medicine can help you. How can the medicine help you when it was not made by God?

Allah almighty made us, made our bodies. And Allah almighty made us strong or weak. Sometimes to test us he makes us fall sick, and that is the way he tells us "now you see that I am stronger than you, I am the real power."

So when we are sick, who makes us sick? We cannot fall sick unless Allah lets us fall sick. And if Allah lets us fall sick then it is Allah who will make us better too. The medicine cannot do anything unless Allah is there to give his power to the medicine.

So do not believe in *daun Ketung* or any other remedy or drug. None of this will work unless Allah almighty decides to help you.

If a car is broken where do you take it to? You take it to the mechanic don't you? Why? Because the car was made by the mechanic, and the mechanic knows how to repair the car and make it better. So when your body is sick, who do you take it to? You take it to Allah, because Allah is the one who made it and only Allah can repair your body and make it better again.

And without Allah's help, all the medicine in the world cannot help you. The best medicine for us is still our prayers. When you are sick and you want to get better, you must offer your prayers to Allah almighty because Allah is still the best doctor. He made you, so he knows how to make you better.

## **Appendix B.**

### **Summary of a group discussion after *asar* prayers led by Cikgu Rushdi, Markaz Besar Jala.**

(The discussion took place on the first day of our stay at the *Markaz Besar* and involved a group of newly acquainted *Tablighs* who were meeting for the first time. Two of them were recent converts and they were being welcomed by Cikgu Rushdi. It was an informal gathering clustered in one corner of the main prayer hall with no formalities. No texts were used and no notes were taken.)

Q. One of the new converts introduced himself and explained that he was happy to be at the Markaz for the first time.

A. (Cikgu Rushdi): Thanks to Allah almighty we have a new brother among us and we thank Allah almighty for bringing us here so that we may do good work in spreading the true teaching of Islam to our community. I know that for some of you this is a new experience and you must be wondering why we live the way we do, and why we choose this life. Here we are all brothers and this mosque belongs to all of us, those who keep to the path of the Kalimah and those who are prepared to show Allah almighty how much we love him and how much we are prepared to do everything to honour his name and glorify him.

Some of you must be thinking of your families back home, but do not worry. Not too long ago I was like you too, and I was worried as well. Every time I went to the mosque my heart was sad and I kept asking who will take care of my wife, my children? Who? My family cannot take care of themselves; my friends cannot come to take care of my wife and children. Who will pay for their food, who will send my children to school, I kept asking myself.

But after going to the mosque once, twice, thrice; I returned home and everything was fine. Praise be to Allah, all is fine with my wife and children, they are healthy and safe, they are doing well in school.

Who did this? Who took care of them? My friends did not come to bring money, they did not bring food. But when I asked my wife how they coped she just said to me: there was always rice and fish to buy, and I make enough at the shop to sell and buy. Why should you worry? You have more important things to do at the mosque and when you do these things Allah will be pleased with you, he will protect us and take care of us.

So you see, nothing bad has happened to my family because Allah almighty is the one who has the real power (*yang berkuasa*) and Allah knows all (*yang mengetahui semuanya*). So if you don't even know what is happening in your neighbours' house, and you cannot stop an accident on the road, why do you think you can control your fate and your family's? No, the real power is in the hands of Allah almighty and we are here to do only what Allah wants, and so do not worry.

(Cikgu Rushdi asks the new members to ask him anything they like, and he will reply to their questions. The first question is about the use of the *Serban* (turban) and why they have to wear it.)

A: You are not forced to wear it. But you can if you wish and it looks nicer if you do. When you wear a serban you are actually following the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, and the companions of the Prophet.

Why do you think the Prophet Muhammad wore a *serban*? You think it was for fashion? Or to look good and handsome? Why did the other companions of the Prophet wear it too? Was it the fashion at the time?

No, think about it and you will see the wisdom and greatness of the Prophet. When you wear it for the first time, you immediately feel different, don't you? You feel like a real man, with honour and respect. When people look at you in the street they say he is a respectable man, look how noble he looks.

The Prophet was like that, and he was noble and elegant all the time. That is the difference when you wear a *serban* and when you don't. When we see other people in the streets or in the shops or on the bus who don't wear the *serban* he can be anyone. He can be a shopkeeper, a student, a teacher, a farmer. Nobody remembers him. But when you wear the *serban* people recognise you and they will know you. Do you know why? Because when you wear the *serban* your body changes too.

Can you run and play football when you wear the *serban*? If you see your friend across the street, can you call out to him 'hey!' and go running after him? If you are late to see your friend can you run to see him?

The first thing that happens when you wear a *serban* is you cannot run fast anymore. So what do you do? You walk, and you walk slowly. Then you must also stand up, so that the *serban* does not fall all. When this happens then your body begins to change, and you walk slowly, straight up with your back straight. Immediately you look different, and that is why people will notice you.

That is why we follow the *sunnah* of the Prophet. And the *sunnah* is part of Islam and we follow it because in the *sunnah* are all the instructions to guide us on how to be good Muslims. How do we wash ourselves before we pray, after we use the toilet, when we enter the mosque? How do we do all these things? The lessons all come from the *sunnah* don't they?

Now if the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad tells us these things, then why don't we follow all of the *sunnah*? If the Prophet wore a *serban* it was because he understood why it was important. He knew why he had to look good and serious, and that is why he also carried a staff (*tongkat*) wherever he went. The *tongkat* could protect him, but also it made him look more serious and respectable.

So when we wear the *serban* and carry a *tongkat*, we look the same: We look dignified and people will say “they are real Muslims, and they look like real Muslims.” Not because we simply wear the *serban* and carry the *tongkat*, but because we behave differently when we do. Do you understand?

(The discussion then moves to the question of Western clothes and whether jeans are not suitable for Muslims.)

A: No, western clothes are not *haram*, but why do you need them? We Muslims are not like anyone else. We can live simply because that follows the *sunnah* of the Prophet as well. When I started I was young like you and my friends were asking me “hey why don’t you dress like us anymore, why do you wear the *serban* now, why don’t you wear jeans anymore?”

I said to them now my life is simpler and I am happy. Before I had to wear expensive clothes to make friends; all the time I had to go out with them to places I did not really want to go to. I had to wear nice shirts, have nice trousers, then have a nice motorbike. It never stopped. The more I had, the more I needed to have.

But then I learned that we can live like this and everything is there for us; everything is already provided for by Allah almighty.

At first my friends laughed at me, they thought I was crazy! But then they came to accept and soon one by one they began to see things my way too and they began to change.

When you have all these modern clothes your life can never be happy. Why? Because unless you follow the *sunnah* of the Prophet how can you be happy? The *sunnah* is there to show us the way to the best life, the best life imaginable. You cannot imagine how happy you can be when you realise that this is the way we should all live.

When you are young you always want excitement. You need music, you need to go to watch movies at the cinema, to watch TV all the time.

But when I saw that I didn’t need any of these things, I threw them all away. I told my parents to throw away the TV in our home. My mother did not want to do that



because we just had a new TV and she wanted to watch all her favourite programs on TV in the evening. But soon they turned it off whenever I came into the room. Until in the end they gave it away and we didn't have a TV anymore.

Now my family is much happier because they don't have to work so hard to get the money to buy all these things that they don't need.

So to be happy, you have to start by giving away all these things. Our Prophet and his companions were the happiest Muslims ever, nobody has ever been as happy as them. That is because they lived only to worship Allah almighty and that made them happy. They did not need to show off, to brag to others, to say "see how rich we are." The Prophet and his companions were the poorest people in their community, but look what happened? Allah almighty gave them his love, and made them the rulers of that community! In the end Islam grew and grew until it spread all over the world.

How can you compare the happiness of buying things or wasting time at shops with that? How can you compare the happiness of *duniawi* when there is the greater happiness that Allah wants to give you?

(The discussion then moves on to the topic of Television and other forms of entertainment.)

A: Television is not *haram*, but it is even better if you don't watch it because so much of what you see on TV are lies and nonsense. All these programs are to entertain you, but when you are entertained like that it makes you forget your duties.

TV is all right when it has religious programs and sometimes you can watch these programs on video or DVD too. That is permissible because it allows us to learn more and to become better people and better Muslims. If your family has a TV set then you should tell them to watch such religious programs because that will be good for them. Don't let them watch nonsense because it doesn't help anyone and is just a waste of everyone's time.

If they don't want to follow your advice, then you can simply leave. I know you don't want to offend your families and friends, but you are teaching them to do good and to do the right thing, so you do not have to be sorry for that. So if you can avoid TV, then do it and tell them to do it too.

Cinema on the other hand is very bad because it cannot educate you at all. And cinemas are full of bad people who are there to do vice (maksiat) because it is always dark in the cinema.

If you walk at night, would you not bring a torch or a light with you? We all know that bad things can happen in the dark, you can fall into a hole, you can trip, someone might rob you or attack you. So we always need to bring a light with us at night when we walk in the dark.

But in the cinema it is dark too, so why is there no light? Why do they keep the lights off in the cinema? It is to let people do bad things to each other: they drink alcohol, they buy and sell drugs, they commit vice. Boys and girls go to the cinema to be close to each other because they do not dare to do that in public. If they walk together and kiss in public in the daylight, they will be ashamed because they know it is a bad thing to do. So when they go to the cinema to be close in the dark, it means they know they are doing something wrong but they have no shame anymore.

That is why all these places that are dark like cinemas and nightclubs are bad places to be avoided. They are all places of vice (*tempat maksiat belaka*) and you should go anywhere near them.

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