

## Webinar

# Governing Religious Diversity Through Deep Respect for Religion: Asian Approaches

9 June 2021

Online - Zoom - 20.00 - 22.00 MYT; 14.00 - 16.00 CEST

**A regional workshop from the GREASE research project organised by the Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD)**

## Introduction

Asia as a region is geographically expansive and populous characterized by diverse religious and cultural variation. The majority of the countries in this region are home to dozens of different ethnic groups (and in some cases, hundreds), many with their own distinct languages, cultures, and religious ideals. This depth in the demographic range, coupled with complex historical past coloured by periods of colonialism, affects the way scholars and national leaders dealt with the question of religious governance.

In contrast to the European experiences, there is no single majority religion that dominates in the Asian region and different religions predominate in different countries and sub-regions. This crucial feature is manifested in the differing constitutional arrangements in different countries within Asia that give priority to a range of different religions, depending on their majority status. Historically, modern 'secular' state institutions in Asia have largely been a product of colonial encounters, often involving the production of the very notions of religiosity and secularity that are distinct and unique. For example, while many Asian states adopted secular forms of government and appeared to embrace rational forms of authority that support such secular forms, religion has never retreated to the private domain. In fact, it continues to be a visible and dominant marker in the social, cultural, and political life of the societies.

These distinctive characteristics of the Asian region, in terms of the historical encounter between religion and the modern state, the range and depth of its religious diversity, and finally its geopolitical complexities, warrant a different mode of inquiry to understand the regulatory modes and practices in governing religions in Asian countries. In this context, this webinar is aimed at discussing the Asian experiences in managing religious diversities in some selected Asian countries namely Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. It seeks to examine the core values, the prospect, and the challenges that are faced by the state and civil societies in engaging with religious governance. Among the themes to be explored are the main differences between the religious make-up of today's Asian (particularly Southeast Asian) societies in contrast to the West, in relation to their experiences, the subject of secularism and its positioning vis a vis to religious governance, and the challenges of managing diversity.

## Programme

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20.00- 20.05 Introduction  
**Imran Mohd Rasid** | Strategic Information & Research Development Centre

Research Fellow at Strategic Information & Research Development Centre, Malaysia. His area of research includes critical theory, Malaysian political history, global political economy, and the phenomenon of transnational and translocal religio-political movements. He has formerly served as Research Analyst for Islamic Renaissance Front, an Islamic Think Tank that works to promote progressive Islamic discourses in Malaysia

20.05 - 20.20 Opening Speech  
**Wan Zawawi Ibrahim** | Strategic Information & Research Development Centre and Taylor's University Malaysia

Dr Wan Zawawi Ibrahim is currently affiliated with Malaysia's Strategic Information and Research Development Center and is also a visiting professor at Taylor's University Malaysia. He is a former Professor of Anthropology in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences and the Institute of Asian Studies at University Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He is the principal researcher of GREASE Research project focusing on Malaysian case study on religious governance, radicalisation and resilience. His research and publications include religious diversity governance, Malay peasants, rural labour and Indigenous communities, globalization and multiculturalism, contemporary Malaysian popular music (including nasyid) and cinema. His current research projects include Islamic Cinema in Indonesian and Malaysia, and indigenous storytelling. His published books include *Borneo Studies in History, Society and Culture*, (eds. with Victor T. King and Nur Hasharina Hassan, 2017), *Human Insecurities in Southeast Asia*, (eds. with Paul Carnegie and Victor T. King, 2016). *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World* (ed. 2012). *Blogging and Democratisation in Malaysia: A New Civil Society in the Making* (with Jun-E Tan, 2008), *Representation, Identity and Multiculturalism in Sarawak* (ed., 2008), *The Malay Labourer : By the Window of Capitalism* (1998), and *Cultural Contestations: Mediating Identities in a Changing Malaysian Society* (ed., 1998). His forthcoming book is: *Discourses, Agency and Identity in Malaysia Critical perspectives*, Springer (eds. With Gareth Richard & Victor T. King, 2021).

20.20 - 21.30 **Dina Zaman** | IMAN Research

Dina Zaman is a Malaysian journalist and writer and a co-founder of IMAN Research, whose aim is to examine the connections between society, religion and perception in order to strengthen community resilience. For many years she worked in the media, as an editor and columnist at *Malaysiakini*, the *Malaysian Insider* and the *Malay Mail Online*. Her most recent book "Holy Men, Holy Women: A Journey Into the Faiths of Malaysians and Other Essays" (2018) is published by SIRD.

**Pradana Boy Zulian** | University of Muhammadiyah

Dr. Pradana Boy Zulian's expertise is in the field of Islamic legal theory and thought as well as contemporary Islamic thought. Other than Islamic Law, his interests include the history of Islam, Islamic philosophy and religious studies. During his academic career, Pradana has been widely involved in the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue for more than 15 years through writing, dialogue, talks and sermons. He is currently a member of the Interreligious Leaders' Forum in Batu, East Java, Indonesia that holds monthly meetings of religious leaders to discuss issues pertaining to interreligious relationships. He is also the chairman of Muhammadiyah Youth Movement for East Java of Indonesia. Among his notable publications is *Fatwa in Indonesia: An Analysis of Dominant Legal Ideas of Fatwa-Making*

Agencies and their Implication in the Post-New Order Period (Amsterdam University Press, 2017). He is responsible for GREASE's case study on Indonesia and for our comparative regional analysis in Southeast Asia.

**Ahmad El-Muhammady** | ISTAC-IIUM

Dr. Ahmad El-Muhammady is an Assistant Professor at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM). Besides that, he holds various external positions such as Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), The Hague, Associate Research Fellow at the Accounting Research Institute (ARI), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia and International Advisory Committee Member at Global Peace Institute (GPI), United Kingdom. Since 2011, he works closely with the Special Branch's Counter-Terrorism Division, Royal Malaysia Police and Prison Department to implement the Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation programs for individuals detained under terrorism laws in Malaysia. Ahmad is also a member of Deradicalisation Panel and Expert/Specialist appointed by the Ministry of Home Affairs for cases investigated under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) 2012 and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) 2015. Prior to that, he was a consultant to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2019), and co-authored a report with Ben Schonveld, senior consultant at the United Nations on the return of foreign terrorist fighters in Southeast Asia. Ahmad also served as think-tank member (2014-2019) and consultant (2018-2019) to the Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES), Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia.

**Norshahril Saat** | ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute

Dr Norshahril Saat is Senior Fellow at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. In June 2015 he was awarded his doctorate in International, Political and Strategic Studies by the Australian National University (ANU). His research interests are mainly on Southeast Asian politics and contemporary Islamic thought. He has written several books such as *The State, Ulama, and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia*; *Tradition and Islamic Learning: Singapore Students in the Al-Azhar University*; and *Islam in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Modernity*. His earlier books include *Faith, Authority and the Malays: The Ulama in Contemporary Singapore*; *Majulah! 50 Years of Malay/Muslim Community in Singapore* (co-edited with Zainul Abidin Rasheed); and *Yusof Ishak: Singapore's First President*. His articles have been published in journals such as the *Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life*, *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, and *Studia Islamika*. Since 2011, he has also published more than 170 opinion and think pieces, including those in local newspapers such as the *Straits Times*, *Berita Harian*, *Berita Mediacorp* and *Today*; and international newspapers such as the *South China Morning Post*, *Stars Insight*, *Channel News Asia*, *Canberra Times*, *Bangkok Post* and the *Jakarta Post*.

21.30 - 22.00 Discussion