



Islamic Political Ideas in Malaysia under Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Contributions and Challenges

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Published online: 31 October 2025

To cite this article: Muhamad Helmy Sabtu, Shah Rul Anuar Nordin and Nurul Aimi Razali. 2025. Islamic political ideas in Malaysia under Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Contributions and challenges. *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* 32(2): 19–39. <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2025.32.2.2>

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Abstract. In the Malaysian political landscape, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) has grown from a small to an influential Malay-Islamic party under the leadership of three early figures, namely Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy. Their leadership was essential as they guided the party from its formation to eventually governing states in Malaysia. This study explored the impact of these figures' leadership on the party and the country over their 18-year tenure. A case study research design was employed to elucidate their leadership experiences. Document analysis was employed to gather data from secondary sources, and thematic analysis was conducted to identify the contributions and challenges faced by these leaders, as well as to assess their leadership efficacy. The results were reported in chronological order, consistent with the historical descriptive analysis employed. The study findings revealed that these political figures had made various contributions, particularly in establishing Islamic ideologies and practices, which paved the way for the party's direction and fostered electoral success. Despite facing various challenges, PAS has emerged as a party that represents conservative Islam, from right-wing to left-wing nationalism, which later became its core ideology (conservative nationalism) that remains to this day.

Keywords and phrases: Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), political leadership, political Islam, Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Abdul Hadi Awang

Introduction

The Malaysian Islamic Party, also known as Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), has emerged and grown as an influential Islamic political party in Malaysia under the leadership of Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy as presidents. It is widely believed that the most challenging time for both PAS and its leaders was at the beginning stages of its emergence in Malaysia, as Islam was deemed a foreign element in the pre- and early-independence society. With the British colonial influence dominating the socio-political background of the current society, PAS faced a difficult path when it chose to highlight religion as the core of its endeavour and ideology. Islam was previously a foreign element in the discussions of its implementation in national policies. It was later included and strengthened in 1981, following Mahathir Mohamad's reign as the country's prime minister after Hussein Onn and continued by the prime minister after him (Muhamad Helmy, Amalin and Khairul 2021).

The leadership of Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy contributed to laying the cornerstone for the establishment of PAS as a political movement that fights for Malay and Islamic interests in the government. They also initiated the era of the imperative, which demonstrates the people's acceptance of an Islamic party within the Malaysian democratic system. PAS, which started as a "foreign" and moulded conservative-nationalist party, later emerged as a ruling party for two states in Malaysia through the electoral system. In fact, PAS still maintains its hold in one of the states, namely Kelantan, for almost 32 years and retains the same core ideology to this day. Therefore, the leadership led by these three figures was proven to be significant and examining their leadership could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of PAS during its earliest phase of emergence and its impacts on PAS leaders of the succeeding decades, up to the present day.

The current study believes that leadership style plays a pivotal role in shaping the ideological orientation and political trajectory of a party and that previous leaders often imprint their personal visions and strategies upon the party. For example, Mohd Asri Muda, the fourth president of PAS, brought PAS forward as a right-wing nationalist party that was in favour of the establishment, such as Ahmad Fuad and Abbas Alias. Meanwhile, the leadership of Yusof Rawa and Fadzil Noor was closer to the inclination of Burhanuddin al-Helmy, who distanced himself from the right-wing nationalist party and advanced to a more left-wing and radical spectrum. This corresponds to the present-day PAS under the leadership of Abdul Hadi Awang, who reiteratively instils the element of Malay nationalism into PAS's Islamic undertaking, resembling the three early presidents.

Accordingly, this article aimed to elucidate the leadership of the three early PAS presidents, namely Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy, with a particular focus on their contributions and challenges in constructing and strengthening the party's foundation as the first Islamic party in Malaysia, which has managed to maintain its relevance in the local political landscape to this day. The study believed that the ideas set forth by the three leaders had triumphantly paved the way for PAS to the forefront of the country's political landscape. By understanding the ideas, contributions and challenges faced by the three early leaders, a more comprehensive grasp and understanding of the past and present of PAS can be achieved.

Review of the Leadership of Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy

Ahmad Fuad was the founder of PAS. He was elected as *yang dipertua agung* (now known as president) of the party from its inception in 1951 until his resignation in 1953. The ideas and focus of his endeavour concentrated on national independence and Malay nationalism issues. Upon being appointed as the president of PAS, his inaugural speech, entitled "We Are Nothing, As We Are Not United", clearly illustrated his concern about the idea of Malay unification (Wan Saiful 2018). During the first PAS Congress or Muktamar PAS on 4 January 1953, the party set four goals to establish an independent nation. This included achieving national independence, homeland sovereignty, national development and improved communication. PAS even expressed its readiness to promote democracy and achieve national independence through the system (Farish 2004). The leadership of Ahmad Fuad had therefore established PAS as a right-wing Malay nationalist party that agreed with the idea of demanding national independence through a roundtable negotiation with the British. Nonetheless, the focus was on conservative issues such as the Malay language, the position of the Malays, the status of Malay rulers and the position of Islam as a federal religion (Farish 2016).

Following the resignation of Ahmad Fuad, members of the PAS General Committee agreed to appoint Dr. Haji Abbas Alias as the second president. Like Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias was also a member of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) before joining PAS during its establishment. Although several ideas propounded by Abbas Alias during his leadership period with PAS seemed vague, some of the stances and actions taken during his era still echoed nationalism. PAS's actions in defending the Malay status quo, the religion of Islam and the Malay language thus proved its determination towards the endeavour of Malay nationalism. For instance, while attending the National

Convention organised by Tunku, PAS objected to the UMNO-Malaysian Chinese Association's (MCA) proposal on *jus soli* citizenship (based on place of birth) for non-Malays (Baharuddin, 1994). Pertaining to the right to vote, PAS was of the view that only citizens of the Malay rulers and the Federation of Malaya should be granted voting rights, due to their distrust of the loyalty of other citizens. PAS also requested that 65% of the Legislative Council should be Malays.

The Malay nationalist endeavour was also evident in PAS's manifesto during the 1955 General Election. The manifesto stated its stand to eliminate the open-door policy against foreigners (immigrants) to defend the position of the natives (Malays), to establish Malay as the official language of the government and the nation and to fight for independence as soon as possible (Ismail 2011). This situation proves that PAS has been fighting for the Malay-Islamic agenda since its establishment, therefore strengthening the orientation of its ideology towards Malays and Islam (Muhamad Helmy et al. 2021). Funston (1980) also thinks that PAS shares an ideology with UMNO because the basis of its struggle revolves around the interests of the Muslim Malay community.

After Abbas Alias, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy steered PAS as the third president. Burhanuddin was a Malay political and intellectual figure well known for his ideas, philosophy, and broad view on the nation's development and its people. He was referred to as the *Bapa Kebangsaan Melayu* or "Father of Malay Nationalism" by Ahmad Boestamam (1972). He had imposed excellent and outstanding leadership in PAS, which brought the party to its early era of glory. According to Burhanuddin, the concept of Malay nationalism has a wide interpretation. He then posited that a person's race or nationality should never be judged based on the descendant or race to which they belong, but rather on the aspect of national identity they possess. This identity is characterised by two aspects, namely a high spirit of loyalty to the country, as well as one's acceptance, assimilation and practice of the local culture (Zabidin, 2015). In other words, the concept of Malay nationalism is not narrowly adopted by a specific race, such as the Malays, but rather involves the participation of other races, including the Chinese and Indians (Kamarudin, 1980). It also encompasses all citizens and individuals living within the Malay lands (Zabidin 2015).

The left-wing Malay nationalism movement served as a political platform for Burhanuddin to advocate for the Malay nationalist idea. Starting from Kesatuan Melayu Muda to Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) and PAS, his political involvement was largely dominated by left-wing nationalist movements. In fact, PAS was also mobilised as a left-wing party under his leadership (Farish 2016; Wan Saiful 2018; Muhamad Helmy and Muhamad Nadzri 2018). As debated by scholars such as Farish (2004), Kamarudin (1980) and Ismail Said (2011),

Burhanuddin's participation in the left-wing nationalist movement did not indicate ideological adherence to those propounded by Marxists or Leninists. The term "left" used by the British government and UMNO referred to groups that refused to cooperate with their efforts in achieving national independence (Wan Saiful 2018). Rustam (2004) defined "left-wing Malays" as those who mobilised political organisations to fight for Malay nationalism by embracing the broader ideology of the Malay nation-state. Therefore, the left movement comprised those who shared the same goal of fighting for independence, despite having different ideologies and inclinations (Ahmad Nidzammudin 1983).

From an epistemological perspective, the leftists were part of the early nationalist movement that emerged in Malaya circa the 1930s to oppose British colonialism and subsequently demanded independence. Prior to that, resistance against the colonialists was almost non-existent, as the traditional Malay society was still tied to feudalism, while the government and palace institutions had close ties with the British (Milner 2008; Rustam 2004). Right-wing Malay nationalism emerged with the establishment of UMNO in 1946, when it opposed the British-proposed Malayan Union. Both PKMM and Burhanuddin were originally part of the establishment of UMNO, but later opted out as the party was inclined towards the British colonialists (Kamarudin 1980). Burhanuddin indeed had a strong opposition to any party that was inclined towards the British.

The idea of "Melayu Raya" was the highest ambition of Burhanuddin and his left-wing movement. It was built on the foundation of the broad Malay nationalism ideology. Melayu Raya, also known as "Greater Malaya", referred to the formation of a country whose territory consisted of the peninsula of Malaya, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak, aimed at forming a strong Malay empire. The basis for such ambition was the heyday of the classical Malay kingdom, aiming to bring glory to the vast era of the Malay empire that began with the Srivijaya empire, the Majapahit kingdom and the Sultanate of Malacca; those that were diminished, segregated and broken into several small, weak provinces by Western colonialism (Suzy and Khairulnizam 2013).

Burhanuddin intended to form Melayu Raya by combining two nationalities: Indonesian nationalism (formerly the site of the Srivijaya and Majapahit kingdoms) and Malay nationalism (formerly ruled by the Sultanate of Malacca) (Kamarudin 1979). According to Burhanuddin (1946, 4), Melayu Raya is the formation of a great Malay power that "stands alone, noble and great, free and independent" and is on par with other great powers such as China and India. The idea was first proposed at the Malayan Parliament on 1st May 1962, but it

was rejected due to concerns that it would strain relations with neighbouring countries (Saliha 1997). Nevertheless, a federal government named Malaysia was declared a year later, on 16th September 1963, combining the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak.

The advancement of ideology and leadership initiatives, highlighted by Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy, displays effective political leadership in mobilising followers or the local community. They demonstrate clarity in their leadership goals and organised initiatives that were appropriate and guided in achieving them. Through Ahmad Fuad and Abbas Alias's efforts to promote Malay nationalism, which favoured the right-wing, many people during that time became inclined towards issues and concerns related to Malay interests and rights. This portrays the leaders' awareness of the followers' current needs and tendencies. Later, Burhanuddin al-Helmy continued promoting Malay nationalism by expanding its scope and making it more inclusive; however, it was deemed a left-wing nationalist movement due to his efforts in expanding PAS's political reach. Although these three leaders had different ways of moving PAS, they laid a clear foundation for the party and its followers to see their political movement in Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework of Political Leadership

According to Shamsul Amri (1990), leaders are individuals who possess the ability to influence the behaviour of others through thoughts, words, actions, or positions. A leader is the figurehead of a community or social group. Aminudin (1990) believes that leadership commonly refers to three important elements that shape a leadership model, namely the influence of (1) personal relationships, (2) power and (3) purpose. However, scholars argue that the debate on leadership often centres on the elements of power and influence. For instance, elected or appointed leaders play an important role in an organisation, establishment, political party, or country as a whole (Jamaie 2014). This aligns with the view of Yukl (1981), who stated that leadership is an influence exerted between individuals and groups through the process of communication in order to achieve specific goals. In this case, the leadership process requires a two-way relationship of influence and cooperation (Aminudin 1990). There is also leadership interpreted as a situation in which the followers accept the stature of someone who is considered a leader without coercion or determination (Ramlah 2004). In such a case, acceptance is based on the followers' belief in the leader's ability to bring about changes or new ideas that can improve the respective organisation's position.

On the other hand, political leadership describes the interaction between individuals, organisations, roles, values and backgrounds that exist in political actors (Piege 1977). In political leadership, the actors involved often comprise individuals empowered by the political unit that they represent (Hermann 1977; Ofosu-Anim 2022). According to Jamaie (2014), two significant differences can be found between the epistemology of leadership in general and political leadership, namely the ideological impact carried by a leader and the advantages of political leadership in being able to control government policies. Typically, political leadership tends to manipulate government policies in the interests of more dominant groups. Aminudin (1990) posits that leaders who want to bring about certain changes in their groups will impose social control in order to articulate ideas on what must be done, who should obtain it, how and why. This aligns with Mohamad Ali (2004) and Khairul Azman, Nurul Aimi, Lutfan, Muhamad Helmy, Muhammad Fuad, Mohamad Ainuddin Iskandar and Mohd Shukri (2021), who view political leadership as the ability of a person in a high position to influence or direct others to do something, either a positive thing or vice versa.

It is common for leaders to face internal and external challenges in developing their ideas. Subsequently, their success in overcoming these challenges is often an indicator of their leadership ability. According to Abd Ghapa and Nik Anuar (1996), leadership effectiveness can be measured based on three factors: (1) the ethnic dominance represented, (2) the level of intelligence and (3) the leader's particular stance. From the aspect of ethnic dominance, they believe that leaders who represent a dominant ethnicity will face fewer problems than those from minority ethnicities. Meanwhile, the level of intelligence refers to the leaders' ability to generate ideas, effect change, conduct critical evaluation and devise effective strategies in overcoming challenges faced during their leadership period. Finally, a leader's stance refers to the ultimate goal of one's political leadership. Leaders tend to take a less popular approach to achieve a goal (Jamaie, 2014).

This study aimed to analyse the three early leaders of PAS: (1) Ahmad Fuad, (2) Abbas Alias and (3) Burhanuddin al-Helmy, based on three main elements proposed in the theoretical framework of political leadership (i.e., the ability to represent the dominant ethnic, the level of intelligence and the ultimate goal of leading) to identify and elucidate their effectiveness in leading the party.

Methodology

This study focused on the leadership experiences of the three PAS presidents by employing a qualitative approach and utilising a case study design. The document analysis method was utilised to collect the required data from secondary sources, including research articles, thesis dissertations and books on the three early leaders. Thematic analysis was conducted on the documents to identify recurring themes regarding the presidents' contributions and challenges from the start of independence until the eighteenth year of PAS under their leadership. According to Boyatzis (1998) and Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013), thematic analysis is a technique for encoding qualitative data to discover recurrent themes, such as subjects, ideas and patterns of relevance. The political leadership theory was also utilised to guide the analysis in accommodating a better and more comprehensive explanation of the subject matter. The findings were then reported based on a chronological account of the events following the suggestion of the historical descriptive analysis approach in reporting data and findings for past events (Junior, Best and Cotter 2014; Trim 1959).

Findings and Discussion

The contributions and challenges of Ahmad Fuad Hassan's leadership (1951–1953)

Ahmad Fuad's major contribution to national politics was the establishment of the Islam-oriented party Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya. His ability to ensure that the dominant ethnic group in Malaya was represented demonstrated his effectiveness as a leader. He bravely introduced and championed the role of religion, which was previously considered a personal aspect of one's life, into the country's political discourse. He emphasised the importance of Islamic ideas and interests, which are the religious concerns of the majority of people in the country, namely the Malays. Efforts to pioneer the Islamic party began during his service as Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau, which was an ulama wing under UMNO. Under his leadership, UMNO had successfully organised the Malayan Ulama Congress (Kongres Ulama' Tanah Melayu), which was held for the first time from 21st to 22nd February 1950 in Muar, Johor.

The congress was initially UMNO's strategy to win the support of religious and rural Malay communities. Ahmad Fuad managed to convince the participants that UMNO was a party that fights for Malays and Islam (Farish 2016). Following its success, the second and third series of the congress were held on 23rd August

1951 and 24th November 1951. The second congress reached two important resolutions in the country's political course, namely the establishment of a supreme body of Islam at the national level and the creation of an association of ulama that was independent of any political party (Funston 1976).

The notion to establish such an ulama association was eventually substantiated during the third congress, when Ahmad Fuad was appointed as the first president. The decision to establish an independent Islamic party, which was no longer under the reign of UMNO, was prompted by several factors. The first factor was due to the ulama's dissatisfaction with UMNO's leadership under Dato' Onn Jaafar, particularly on the issue of *Natrah*. The issue that involved the aspect of religion caused a major stir within the national political scenario from 1950 to 1951. *Natrah*, a convert to Islam and married to a Malay man, was eventually handed over to the British and sent back to her family in the Netherlands. This incident triggered dissatisfaction among the Malay Muslim community. UMNO's failure and incapability of responding to the incident gave rise to an Islamist camp within the party that eventually led to the separation of the Islamic party from UMNO (Farish 2016).

Besides that, UMNO faced a leadership crisis in 1950 when Onn Jaafar proposed to open the party's membership to other races. Such a proposal was made as part of the effort to enable Malaya to achieve independence, as the British required racial unification in Malaya and the acceptance of citizenship by non-Malays before independence could be granted. His proposal, however, was strongly opposed by UMNO delegates. Eventually, he was forced to resign from the party on 27th August 1951 (Ramlah 1992). Onn Jaafar then suggested Ahmad Fuad as the eligible candidate for UMNO's president, but Ahmad Fuad lost to Tunku Abdul Rahman during the election (Ibrahim 1981). Following his resignation, Onn Jaafar later founded the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), prompting Ahmad Fuad to establish his own Islamic party. At the same time, Ahmad Fuad received internal pressure stating that the unification of Islam would never succeed under UMNO, as the party's foundation was formed without close reliance on the Quran and Sunnah, alongside the implementation of many non-Islamic policies (Funston 1980). Apart from the issues with *Natrah*, Onn Jaafar, and UMNO, the ulama were also uneasy with Tunku's personality, which was characterised by his Western lifestyle (Farish 2016). These factors thus prompted the formation of a new Islam-oriented political party.

Ahmad Fuad propounded Islamic idealism under PAS, which marked the party's significant contribution, particularly in the formation of a pre-independent state. His idealism demonstrated his distinctive intelligence as a leader, as he managed to establish a fairly significant agenda for his undertaking in politics,

albeit because of his inclination towards the importance of Islam in his life. He upheld the religion of the people, which is the most basic and important element of human everyday life, which was Islam. He had since firmly voiced his stance on issues involving Islam, even since his early years in UMNO. This was evident when he strongly opposed UMNO's sponsorship of the lottery and intended to leave the party if the policy persisted.

PAS, under the leadership of Ahmad Fuad, played an important role in highlighting Islamic ideas in the implementation of the British administration, which was fundamentally secular and Westernised. Among the suggestions made to the government were introducing Islamic education for Muslim pupils in English schools and the enforcement of laws prohibiting the sale of liquor to Muslims (Ismail 2011). Such idealism was consistently practised during his leadership with PAS, as the party's second congress, held on 26th to 27th August 1953, urged the government to ban all forms of lotteries and gambling in Malaya. Although the results of these efforts were minimal, the party's demands represented the interests of Islam at that time.

Ahmad Fuad's intelligence as a political leader was demonstrated through his strategies in laying out the main capstones for the party from its early development, which have remained in place to this day. Under his leadership as president, PAS had established three main wings (i.e., councils), namely: (1) youths, (2) ulama and (3) muslimah. Previously, the role of the ulama council was limited to serving as advisors on religious affairs within the party and they had no executive power or veto as their functions are today (Badlihiham and Napisah 2011). The three councils serve as an important basis for the development of PAS as an Islamic party that represents all levels of society, in addition to its structure, which remains in place to this day. Ahmad Fuad's leadership also enabled PAS to establish 16 new branches. Among these branches were Butterworth, Pulau Pinang, Kuala Kangsar, Parit Buntar, Perak, Kangar, Perlis, Pasir Mas, Machang, Kelantan and Kuala Lumpur (Ismail 2011). Despite having a relatively small membership of fewer than 5,000 members, the opening of new branches served as a good indicator of the party's development, which began to gain a foothold in society.

Nevertheless, Ahmad Fuad's leadership did not steer away from weakness. One of the main flaws of his leadership was the dual-party membership (overlapping membership) that was allowed in PAS (Baharuddin 1994). While leading PAS, Ahmad Fuad also maintained a direct relationship with UMNO and remained the Head of UMNO's Religious Affairs Bureau. As a result of PAS being led by one of UMNO's top leaders, the party's endeavour as a whole had no significant

difference from UMNO. In short, his dual-party membership portrayed a weak top leadership structure of PAS, causing significant disorganisation within its internal coordinators (Farish 2016). In addition, during Ahmad Fuad's era, PAS was criticised as a weak party for lacking a clear political direction and goals and merely functioning as an Islamic welfare body (Funston 1980; Safie 1981). Thus, his limited focus on the newly formed PAS had led to leadership weaknesses in the party.

Ahmad Fuad was known for his firm stance in fighting for independence alongside other major political parties of diverse backgrounds, without abandoning Islamic idealism. Challenges to Ahmad Fuad's leadership also emerged following his proposal to attend a conference organised by Onn Jaafar and the IMP. Other leaders in PAS rejected his proposal to fight for independence together with Onn Jaafar by creating a multi-ethnic and cross-racial political party. However, during that time, the party's leadership chose to attend the convention organised by Tunku Abdul Rahman with the UMNO-MCA Alliance. Contrary to Onn Jaafar's idea, Tunku and UMNO wanted to fight for independence by maintaining a race-based party and collaborating with political elites of other races. Following the rejection of his proposal, Ahmad Fuad decided to resign as PAS president during a special meeting held on 26th September 1953 (Syahidulamri 2016).

The party's rejection of Ahmad Fuad's leadership proved the existence of conservative trends that dominated PAS from the beginning (Wan Saiful 2018). This event also implied that Ahmad Fuad's ultimate goal in leading PAS was to bring about and ensure the relevance of integrating Islamic idealism in the pursuit of independence. However, he was unable to proceed any further as he was respectful towards the majority voice of the party. Although it seems that his leadership was partly ineffective in the sense that he was unable to bring together the members to embrace multi-ethnic idealism, he still earned immense respect for upholding the main interests of the party.

Ultimately, Ahmad Fuad's leadership can be rendered as an endeavour towards independence, but with the incorporation of Islamic ideas and interests expressed through a platform. PAS, under his reign, was an alternative movement among Malays in opposition to UMNO, which was perceived as insufficiently Islamic in its approach. Despite being moderately effective, his leadership can still be perceived as significant, notably in uniting the voices of ulama and the supporters of Islam through a unified organisational movement in the pre-independence era.

The contributions and challenges of Abbas Alias's leadership (1953–1956)

Abbas Alias led PAS for a short period of time but played a significant role in the party. During his leadership, he implemented several effective measures to address the previous leader's weaknesses. Among his major contributions to the party was when PAS began to be mobilised as a real political platform. PAS was registered as a legitimate political party on 31st May 1955, a day before the nomination day for the first election of the Federation of Malaya. Such registration was crucial in enabling PAS to operate as an official political party without being affiliated with any other political party, including UMNO. It also allowed PAS to participate in the nation's political elections. As the president, Abbas led PAS to contest in the first general election held on 27th July 1955, where the party contested for 11 seats, compared to the UMNO-MCA Alliance (52 seats) and Parti Negara, led by Onn Jaafar (33 seats). PAS managed to win one seat in Kerian, Perak, while the UMNO-MCA Alliance took the remaining 51 seats. The participation of PAS in the election was not only to fight for independence but also to enable the voices and interests of Islam to be heard. This signified the effectiveness of his leadership, as he was exceptionally certain about his stance in bringing forward PAS as a political entity in the political scene.

Apart from registering PAS as a separate political party from UMNO, several important principles of the party were also practised during his era. In the previous PAS leadership, Ahmad Fuad was seen as a reflection of UMNO. Consequently, the ultimate goal of Abbas Alias was to steer PAS away from the party. His leadership era was regarded as the phase of redefining and setting the initial direction of the party (Farish 2016). It included the decision to disallow individuals with dual-party membership from holding high positions in PAS. Such a decision was reached during the Third PAS Congress in 1953, before it was fully implemented in 1955, when the party no longer accepted individuals with dual membership (Funston 1980). This resulted in many leaders and members leaving the party and voting for UMNO. On the other hand, those who remained with PAS were truly loyal to its Islamic undertaking. The party's direction was clearer under Abbas Alias's leadership.

PAS, under the leadership of Abbas, also rejected the model of independence brought by UMNO-MCA and moved as an independent party that had no ties with the Alliance nor Parti Negara.

Despite the various major contributions made during his leadership, PAS remained a minor and weak party compared to other national parties such as UMNO and MCA, which were more accepted by the public. This was because PAS brought the image of *parti lebai*—a term commonly used to describe devout yet unsophisticated Muslims—thereby reinforcing its reputation as a conservative Islamic party. The people of the time were inclined to accept political leaders who were proficient in English and had undergone Western secular education (Ismail 2011). Although the majority of voters in the 1955 General Election were Malays, PAS's achievement in the election was subpar, as evidenced by its ability to win only one seat, despite having the majority of Malay voters. Meanwhile, 10 other PAS candidates lost their bids during the election (Farish 2016). This suggested that Abbas Alias's leadership was ineffective in representing the dominant ethnic group, as the party was unable to capture the hearts and votes of the Malays. However, PAS was said to be championing its most important role in life.

Despite his lack of substantial electoral support, Abbas Alias retained significant esteem as a political leader, indicating his brilliance. Through the 1955 General Election, the UMNO-MCA Alliance was also given the mandate by the British to rule the country after independence. Whereas PAS remained a poor party with a lack of funds, a weak workforce and an unsystematic chain of command when compared to other parties (Farish 2016). Despite the significant loss, he proceeded to lead PAS in joining and later sending a memorandum to the Reid Commission in which he raised two issues, namely that Malaya's national identity should be based on the Malay cultural identity and Malaya should belong to the Malays and that Islam should be made the official religion of the country. However, the call made by PAS on these matters was disregarded by the British, who only negotiated with UMNO as the representative of the voice and interests of the Malay-Muslims in this country. Following this incident, Abbas Alias believed that PAS needed a strong and vocal leader for its Islamic voice to be heard by the British and the ruling elites.

Although seen as less effective in terms of electoral achievements and not being the party of choice for the public and Malays, the leadership of Abbas Alias had succeeded in turning the spotlight on PAS as an Islamic political party that has progressed through the trajectory of democracy and elections. He also pioneered the outright departure of PAS from UMNO as its parent party, even though it still functioned within the right-wing spectrum, which promoted ideas pertinent to Malay-Islamic interests through the medium of diplomacy and negotiation. Abbas finally resigned and handed over the reins of leadership to Burhanuddin al-Helmy on 25 December 1956, as the party's top leader.

The contributions and challenges of Burhanuddin al-Helmy's leadership (1956–1969)

Burhanuddin's leadership brought significant transition and modification to PAS. His leadership as PAS president was described as uniting three main elements: nationalism, Islamism and socialism, which became the party's core undertaking (Farish 2016; Ismail 2011). His idea was later known as the ambition to implement the system of "theocratic socialism" or "Islamic socialism" (Wan Saiful 2018; Farish 2016). According to Wan Saiful (2018), theocratic socialism is a political system that is collective (centralised) and the government is controlled or advised by the religious group in order to form an ideal social system. Farish (2016) further added that the system differs from the theocracy (church power) practised in the West during the Dark Ages of Europe and instead has a close resemblance to the caliphate ruling system practised throughout the Islamic civilisation. PAS, founded by Burhanuddin, aimed to construct an Islamic state in Malaysia that implemented *hudud* (mandatory punishments) and Islamic laws. He also questioned Malaysia as a secular country due to the positioning of other religions at par with Islam and freely practised, while Islam is only positioned as the official religion at the federal level (Farish 2016).

The leadership of Burhanuddin al-Helmy in PAS can be described as the party's first era of uprising. As a Malay left-wing political and intellectual figure, Burhanuddin's entry into PAS helped the newly formed party become more organised, progressive and politically oriented (Farish 2004). His most significant contribution to the party was its great success during the 1959 General Election, which was the first general election held after Malaya achieved independence on 31st August 1957. It was also the second election in which PAS participated. As a new party with all its shortcomings, PAS's achievements in the general election came as a shock to all parties, especially UMNO, as the ruling and government party. PAS emerged as the second-largest party after UMNO when it won 13 parliamentary seats and 42 state assembly (DUN) seats in the 1959 General Election (Farish 2016). This was mainly due to the party's major acquisition from winning only one seat in the 1955 General Election to obtaining the mandate to rule two states on the east coast, namely Kelantan and Terengganu, in the 1959 General Election (Hamdan 2020; Azmil 2018; Farish 2016; Mohd Hasbie 2014; Ahmad Fauzi 2011). Burhanuddin won the Besut parliamentary seat in Terengganu. As a result of the 1959 General Election, PAS emerged as the first Islamic party in Southeast Asia to successfully gain the right to rule through a democratic trajectory. In addition, his success in securing a majority of votes and eventually succeeding in representing the country's dominant ethnic group, namely the Malays, albeit only in Kelantan and Terengganu, demonstrated the

effectiveness of Burhanuddin's leadership. It was a relatively immeasurable win for PAS as compared to the previous general election.

PAS's success in the 1959 General Election served as an indicator of the effectiveness of Burhanuddin's leadership and strategies. The contributions of his leadership, along with Zulkiflee Muhammad as Deputy President, were evident in their efforts to strengthen the party. Realising that PAS was lacking in funds and community support, Burhanuddin set up more branches of the party, focusing on Malay-majority states such as Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu. Kelantan and Terengganu were undoubtedly strategic and perfect states for the early formation of the Islamic party. Despite being populated by more than 90% of the Malay and Muslim population, the anti-establishment political narrative that Burhanuddin advocated was more elemental and preferred by the majority of the people in both states.

In Kelantan, for example, a conflict arose between the two social classes of the community, which were then distinctly represented by PAS and UMNO. The upper-class society, which was closely tied to the Sultan and colonialists, including aristocrats, government officials and wealthy farmers, inclined to side with UMNO. In contrast, the lower-class society, such as low religious bureaucrats, Malay intellectuals and poor farmers, entrusted their support and loyalty to PAS. Burhanuddin, who was undoubtedly vocal and frank in criticising and opposing the colonialists and the circles that conspired and manoeuvred with them (including the Malay and UMNO rulers) (Kessler 1978). Therefore, it was anticipated that the opposing political idea carried by Burhanuddin, flourishingly immersed in the structure of Malay society, principally in the rural areas of the states (Aznil 2018; Funston 1976; Mohd Faidz et al. 2014; Muhamad Helmy 2023; Siti Ruzana et al. 2020).

Furthermore, Burhanuddin also launched *Suara Islam* (Voice of Islam). *Suara Islam* was the first official newspaper owned by PAS, aiming to disseminate the party's propaganda and ideas in support of its struggle. It provided PAS with easy and wide access and coverage. Burhanuddin's strategies and policies as the leader of PAS were not only acknowledged to be effective and successful in lighting the struggling torch of the Islamic movement in Malaya during his time (Zabidin 2015); they also portrayed his intelligence and perception as a leader for the people and PAS's opponents to see. He could foresee the unseen, unthinkable yet successful strategies for PAS to move forward. Nonetheless, Burhanuddin's strategy was proven effective and successful, as evidenced by PAS's soaring achievements in the 1959 General Election.

While the leaderships of Ahmad Fuad and Abbas Alias were described as right-wing and tolerant, the Burhanuddin era marked a transition in PAS towards a more left-wing endeavour (Farish 2016; Ahmad Fauzi 2011; Liow 2004; Funston 1980). Burhanuddin was very clear about his goal in leading PAS. He said, “Indeed, I and on behalf of Islamic associations, do not favour communism and colonialism, PAS and I are full nature and in favour of Malay nationalism with Islamic ideas” (Kamarudin 1979).

His hatred towards UMNO was due to its conspiracy with the British to gain independence for free, subsequently belittling the Malay nation (Zabidin 2015). PAS’s criticism of UMNO was consistent in his era. Apart from being criticised as a secular, pro-Western and elite-interested party, UMNO was also considered a neocolonial system that safeguarded the interests of Western imperialists and capitalists in Malaya (Farish 2016). PAS was then handed over to Mohd Asri Muda (Farish 2016).

Nevertheless, Burhanuddin’s leadership was not spared from several partisan (internal) and external challenges. During his 13 years of leading PAS, Burhanuddin faced opposition from within the party itself (Syahidulamri 2016). For instance, there were several clashes between him and his deputy, Zulkiflee Muhammad. Funston (1980) stated that Burhanuddin’s position in the party was more akin to that of a fatherly figure or ideological leader, as he was less involved in organisational or tactical management. This is also acknowledged by Farish (2016), who stated that Burhanuddin played a more prominent role as a political leader, while Zulkiflee served as a spiritual leader for PAS. Furthermore, Zulkiflee was considered an icon who portrayed the party’s true ideology. In fact, he once reminded Burhanuddin to stay on the path of Islam and Islamism (Wan Saiful 2018). Zulkiflee also challenged Burhanuddin’s position as the party president in the 1956- and 1959-party elections, but Burhanuddin managed to maintain his position as president (Funston 1980). The cooperation between them, however, enabled PAS to dominate Terengganu when it succeeded in winning 13 out of 24 state assembly seats in the 1959 General Election and formed a state government. However, due to internal division in Terengganu, the PAS government lasted only two years before it collapsed (Hasbie 2014; Syahidulamri 2016).

The external challenges faced by Burhanuddin’s leadership included the country’s political situation during his reign. Several significant national events occurred during his tenure as leader of PAS. Some of them were critical that the reactions portrayed by both Burhanuddin and PAS towards the issues impacted the party’s development and achievements. On 16th September 1963, the formation of the Federation of Malaysia was declared, with independence

granted by the British to Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak and their annexation to Malaya. The Federation of Malaysia received strong opposition from Indonesia. President Sukarno launched Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation with the *Ganyang Malaysia* (Crush Malaysia) campaign, which lasted until 1965. PAS Member of Parliaments, led by Burhanuddin, launched an opposition to Tunku's idea of forming a federation, but it was unsuccessful. Burhanuddin, who was known to have close ties with various left-wing movements in Malaya and Indonesia, reacted by supporting Indonesia. PAS itself criticised Tunku's actions, who sought assistance from the British and the Commonwealth to block attacks from Indonesia. In response, the government detained several pro-communist leaders and Burhanuddin himself was barred from participating in the 1964 General Election. PAS ultimately faced repercussions for how they corresponded with Indonesia, resulting in a drop in the party's performance during the 1964 General Election, where PAS secured only nine parliamentary and 25 state seats (Farish 2016).

Although Burhanuddin had steadfastly pursued and boosted his ultimate goal of Malay nationalism, he failed to gain support from the public. It also occurred because the societal atmosphere in the era of independence was heavily influenced by Western moulds, which raised the value of secularism (separation between religion and politics), thereby rejecting Burhanuddin's idea of unification between nationalism and Islam (Zabidin 2015). His image was also distorted, portraying him as a communist figure rather than an Islamic leader (Ramlah 1993). This event had somehow imparted his ineffectiveness as a leader. Kamarudin (1979) described Burhanuddin as a less successful politician because he was firm and unwavering in his principles on a particular matter as opposed to taking a pragmatic approach to *realpolitik*. His thinking was also described as idealistic yet unrealistic (Funston 1980). On 18th January 1965, Burhanuddin was arrested under the Internal Security Act for allegedly supporting Indonesia in a confrontation. His health later deteriorated during custody. Following his release in March 1966, Burhanuddin was no longer active in politics due to his declining health, but he still held the post of PAS president until his death on 25th October 1969.

Conclusion

The leadership of three pioneering PAS figures, Ahmad Fuad, Abbas Alias and Burhanuddin al-Helmy, had a significant impact on the party, the Islamic movement, the Malay world and Malaysia. They made various suggestions and contributions and put them into practice over the course of their 18-year leadership, particularly concerning Islamic ideology and undertaking, which

subsequently determined the party's direction and its electoral success. Even though PAS moved in opposition during these three periods of leadership, their contribution to the advancement of the people and the country should never be disregarded. The most crucial aspect to comprehend is that the three early founders successfully laid the foundation for the PAS movement, giving it its current form as an Islamic party.

The period under Ahmad Fuad's leadership until Burhanuddin can be perceived as the Islamic party's attempt to separate itself from UMNO. The founding of PAS has inadvertently given the Malays an alternative through their propensity to support the Islamic cause and their commitment to uphold the interests of the people. This identity contrasts with UMNO, which, at the time, was more secular and Westernised. The appeal of some Malay people, particularly ulama and Muslims, to break away from UMNO started during the reign of Ahmad Fuad, who eventually established PAS as an organisation of religious scholars that was not formally affiliated with UMNO. Abbas continued Fuad's efforts by dismantling the dual membership system and declaring PAS a legitimate political party that was eligible to run for office. However, Abbas's efforts remained insufficient because PAS was still viewed as weak and limited to serving as an Islamic charity body.

Burhanuddin's entrance into PAS via Abbas proved to be a wise decision as he strengthened PAS's oppositional image through his leadership. Although frequently referred to as a leftist movement, Burhanuddin guided the party from a period of uncertainty and darkness to one of prominence as an Islamic party. Initially a small and ineffective party, PAS has grown to become the dominant force in Kelantan and Terengganu at the state level. In fact, the addition of anti-UMNO opposition political elements brought along by Burhanuddin had strengthened PAS's standing in the two states to this day and his leadership was successful in entirely separating PAS from UMNO. The anti-UMNO policy was then continued in the era of ulama leadership and during the period of PAS's engagement in opposition alliances, such as Pakatan Rakyat (PR) and Barisan Alternatif (BA). This, however, does not detract from the foundational principles of PAS articulated by Ahmad Fuad and Abbas Alias at various intervals, including the 1970s, the years' post-2015 following the formation of Muafakat Nasional and the current collaboration through Perikatan Nasional, which exemplifies PAS's orientation as a conservative and right-wing Islamic party.

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