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MOSQUES AS ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS SPACES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A DISCOURSE ON THE MALAYSIAN AND BRUNEIAN EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The mosque is a distinguished institution in Islam. It has been an influential space for worship, religious, economic, social, and educational institutions, as explicated in historical and present day narratives. However, notwithstanding the spread of COVID-19 which involved multiple Movement Control Orders, the authorities have restricted the role of mosques in many countries, including Malaysia and Brunei. This paper aims to examine the changing role of the mosque as a religious space during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the religious authorities manage the restrictions with linkages to Muslims' religious needs. The researchers specifically examine the role of the mosque during the COVID-19 pandemics and analyse the role of religious authorities in managing religious gatherings in the mosques. The research adopts a qualitative approach of library research for historical and theological viewpoints, and the analysis of policies and guidelines. The researchers present the analysis through contemporary narrative and classical Islamic teachings. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant transformations in the roles and functions of mosques as places of worship, primarily in response to public health and safety concerns. These adaptations have remained aligned with the fundamental principles of Maqasid al-Shariah and the religious authorities have played a crucial role in effecting these changes.

Keywords: Mosque, COVID-19, religious authorities, pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Corona disease 2019 or well known as COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, after 118,000 cases were discovered in 114 countries, resulting in 4291 fatalities (World Health Organization, 2020). COVID-19 spreads through inhaling respiratory droplets generated by infected people when they cough, sneeze, talk, or

through indirect contact. The restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic indeed have changed the way people live and practice their religions (World Health Organization, 2020). COVID-19 is not the first pandemic that has affected people's lives. Previously, pandemics were recorded as critical events in world history and caused diverse impacts and influences on individuals and society. History recorded a massive effect of pandemics which illustrated the human capacity and survival to cope with harsh and hard conditions, despite the terrible and catastrophic consequences that humans faced. The plague, for example, was the most well-known example of pre-modern pandemics. Historians often refer to three major plague pandemics in distinct countries: The Plague of Justinian in the mid-sixth century; the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century; and the Bombay Plague in the late nineteenth century (Dols, 1974).

There is a substantial collection of literature in the Islamic tradition that discusses the plague, particularly as a pandemic in the Muslim society. The major sources and narratives were twofold; first scriptural references in the Quran and Sunnah, and secondly the lessons learned from real epidemic events that prompted Muslim scholars to respond over time. This collection of literature is particularly pertinent as a reference for the recent COVID-19 pandemics, since it essentially deals with the human responses to the challenges with linkages to the Islamic system of belief and practises (Shabana, 2021).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Islamic beliefs and practices remain important even in the situation of pandemics in many countries particularly in South East Asian countries which we will unfold the discussion in the context of Malaysia and Brunei in this paper. Before the pandemics, mosques served as religious spaces, social gatherings, and education, including matters of medical health. In Malaysia, for example, many health awareness programs have been conducted in mosques, which have reached diverse demographic backgrounds of the congregations. The mosques actively participated in health awareness programmes and integrated the role of religion in responding to the medical health issues. However, the spread of COVID-19 and multiple Movement Control Orders by the government have limited the role of mosques.

This paper therefore looks at how the role of the mosque has changed and how the religious authorities managed the changes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia and Brunei. The researchers examine the role of the mosque as a religious space among Muslims during the COVID-19 pandemic and the role played by religious authorities, as well as their justifications

and actions taken with regards to limiting the roles of mosques during pandemic COVID-19 in Malaysian and Brunei contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts an interdisciplinary paradigm that links the theological and sociological dimensions. The research examines the theological adaptation and sociological impacts of COVID-19 concerning religious spaces in Malaysia and Brunei. The theological discussion knowledge sought from al-Quran and al-Sunnah, as well as sociological narratives on the roles of mosques in Malaysian and Brunei society during pandemic.

We apply a qualitative approach of library research for historical and theological data, and content analysis for policies and guidelines by religious authorities of both countries. We examine the traditional and the present narrative of the role of mosques through library research. In addition, we present the Mufti of the Federal Territory Office and MUIB public announcements through media including social media, newspapers, as well as television and radio, to provide an intellectual discourse on this matter.

FINDINGS

Mosque in Islamic Traditions and Modern Days

It is imperative to locate our understanding of the discourse on the mosque as a religious space for the Muslims in its own historical and classical context because within this sphere we could comprehend the past and present roles of mosques, including during the pandemic.

According to the Arabic origins of the word "mosque" called as "masjid", "*sajada, yasjudu, sajdan*" relates to prostration, compliance, obedience, and submission with reverence. The word 'mosque' also includes the word '*khudu,*' which implies submission and humility. It is a symbol of obedience derived from the act of prostration. The mosque serves as a centre for activities in the lives of Muslims and a symbol of togetherness in the spirit of the Muslim *ummah* (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996).

The significance of the mosque was reflected in the history as it was the first structure built by Rasulullah SAW after his departure to Madinah during the migration (*hijrah*) historical event on Friday, 12th Rabi' al-Awwal 1 A.H i.e, September 27th. 622 A.D. (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996). The

Prophet PBUH himself contributed to building the mosque by carrying bricks and stones while reciting “O Allah, there is no life, but the life of the Hereafter, so forgive Thou the Ansar and the Muhajirs.” It has been narrated on the authority of Anas b. Malik that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ " اللَّهُمَّ لَا عَيْشَ إِلَّا عَيْشُ الْآخِرَةِ فَاعْفِرْ لِلْأَنْصَارِ
وَالْمُهَاجِرَةِ " .

Meaning: Anas ibn Malik reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said “O Allah, there is no life, but the life of the Hereafter, so forgive Thou the Ansar and the Muhajirs” (Translation from <https://sunnah.com/muslim>, n.d.).

The mosque is the driving force behind the growth of human capital and the creation of a great Muslim society. In fact, the word mosque appears 26 times in the Qur'an showing the significance of mosque in the Islamic traditions. The mosque serves as a meeting place for the Muslim community to worship and interact with members of the community. It is a place for daily congregational prayers, Friday prayers, and Eid prayers.

In addition to its main function as a space for worship, the mosque became the centre of social activity, education, *dakwah*, economy and politics during the time of the Prophet and his companions. Allah SWT mentioned in the al-Quran;

بِالْعُدُوِّ وَالْأَصَالِ رِجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ فِيهَا ۗ لَهُ يُسَبِّحُ ۗ فِي بُيُوتٍ أَدَانَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ
وَالْأَبْصَارُ الْقُلُوبِ فِيهِ تُتَقَلَّبُ يَوْمًا يَخَافُونَ ۗ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ

(Surah al-Nur, verses 36 & 37)

Meaning: (Lit is such a Light) in houses, which God hath permitted to be raised to honour, for the celebration, in them, of His name, in them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, again and again. By men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the remembrance of God, nor from regular prayer, nor from the practice of

regular charity, their only fear is for the day when hearts and eyes will be transformed in a world wholly new (Translation from Yusuf Ali, 1946).

The Prophet PBUH describes the importance of the mosque by promising benefits in heaven for those who build a mosque, as stated in the hadith below:

وَعَنْ عُثْمَانَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «مَنْ بَنَى لِلَّهِ مَسْجِدًا بَنَى اللَّهُ لَهُ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ» مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ

Meaning: Uthman reported God's Messenger as saying, "If anyone builds a mosque for God, God will build a house for him in paradise (Translation from <https://sunnah.com/muslim>, n.d.).

The Prophet's Mosque in Medina also became the first educational institution in Islamic history. This tradition persisted and extended extensively especially in the Middle East, where mosques served as centres of learning and teaching, such as in Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and other cities (Rifai, 2021). At the same time, the mosque was used for providing welfare and shelter for those who were in need. Al-Mubarakpuri (1996) mentioned that the north of the mosque was reserved for the Muslims who had neither family nor home. This function is still relevant in modern days as mosques are used for shelters during disasters such as floods and earthquakes.

Beyond social and religious functions, the mosque served as a place for economic development activities especially in managing, collecting, and distributing zakat to the needy. The establishment of marketplaces in the neighbourhood of the mosque has been documented throughout Islamic history, contributing to the local economy and economic development. The economic function of the mosque is still relevant in the present day, as mosques are still used as zakat centres and other economic activities, including conducting business in the neighbourhood of the mosques which generate economic benefit for Muslims.

The role of the mosque that mostly faded in the modern era is the mosque as a political centre. The Prophet PBUH particularly used the mosque as a place for planning and discussing the growth of Islam, as well as coordinating war strategy and developing government forms (Suwanto 2021). It was the administrative hub for all Muslim activities, consultative and executive councils were held there (al-Mubarakpuri, 1996). Hence, this supports Alwi's (2015) assertion that

the mosque serves five functions: *Bait Allah* (house of worship to Allah), *Bait al-Ta'lim* (house of education), *Bait al-Maal* (house of socio religious activities such as zakat), *Bait al-Ta'min* (house of social security), and *Bait al-Tamwil* (house of wealth development). These roles were extended and developed further during the Khulafa

Al-Rasyidin, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids. However, the role of mosques in political aspects has been insubstantial due to the current political structure that is using parliament and offices to manage the political matters and the separation of religion from the political sphere in many countries. Despite the limitation of the role of mosques in politics, the role of mosques has extended to support the medical health needs of the society along with growing awareness of the medical health matters in modern days. The institution is used as one of the platforms for medical health experts to engage with congregations and help the communities. In Malaysia, some mosques organised medical health awareness programmes and talks among their congregations. For example, Masjid al-Rahman Bangsar Malaysia has used the mosque space to set up the methadone clinic to help drug addicts and has extended the role of the mosque in the community. The Malaysian methadone program marks the first one based in a mosque where the mosque is involved with the medical health experts in the fight against drug addiction. Interestingly this project is a result of closed engagements between academic researchers, doctors, and the management of the mosque to help the community in medical health matters (<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/world/asia/malaysian-mosque-is-also-methadone-clinic.html>). Similar to Brunei, Majlis Ilmu 2020 was about health and most talks were conducted in the mosques with a combination of religious speakers and medical officers as panels for the talk (<http://www.majlisilmu.gov.bn>). Nevertheless, during COVID-19 pandemics, the religious authorities have used mosques as a place to spread health awareness about COVID-19, specifically in their talks, *khutbah*, infographics posters which have taken place in the majority of the mosques in Malaysia.

Worship and Religious Gathering During COVID-19

During the spread of COVID-19, social distancing is expected and promoted in the communities. This might be a challenge for people as human beings are socializing in economic, social, political, and religious settings. Mosques as a centre for worship that involves religious gathering have faced a big challenge to manage the restriction orders. Both countries, Malaysia and Brunei, have their

own strategies to address the challenges of this restriction while considering the need to pray and worship among Muslims.

As religion goes beyond the geographical boundaries, local and international travel for religious purposes is indeed common. This provides an opportunity for infectious illnesses to spread in the country and to be carried into or out of the host country. The world's biggest religious gathering is the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage in India with over 120 million pilgrims attending the prayer at the banks of four sacred rivers (Memish et al., 2019). Similarly, around five million Christians from around the world visit the Lourdes pilgrimage in France annually (Gautret and Steffen, 2016). Two to three million Muslims from all around the world also assemble in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, for the annual Hajj pilgrimage (Shafi et al., 2008). Unfortunately, the outbreaks of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases are common during religious mass gatherings (Abubakar et al., 2012).

The number of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia spiked from about 30 cases in February 2020 to over a thousand a month later. In Malaysia, the unexpected rise started with a huge Islamic gathering in Kuala Lumpur, which drew 16,000 people. The infected individuals then spread the disease to others in their communities. Another religious gathering, a church assembly in Kuching, Sarawak produced another COVID-19 cluster in Sarawak. Within a few weeks, Malaysia has become one of the badly affected countries by COVID-19 during that period (Tan et al., 2021). Due to these incidents, religious authorities paid extra attention to religious mass gatherings to avoid the repetition of the incidents.

In Brunei, the first verified COVID-19 case was reported in March 2020, with the first COVID-19 mortality recorded on March 28, 2020. The number of cases quickly grew to a hundred in just fifteen days, presumably sparked by a worshipper returning from a mass religious gathering in Malaysia. The authorities stopped the initial wave of the epidemic with control movement orders. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, the governing sultan, established control movement orders by banning citizens and residents from leaving Brunei and outsiders from entering the country and limiting the religious gathering in mosques and public places (International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept, 2021)

When the COVID-19 virus spread widely, religious mass gatherings were put on hold in many countries. The religious authorities started to halt the spread of the pandemic by closing mosques, prayer rooms, and prayer halls. Saudi Arabia, for example, closes the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque for visitors. Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam are on the same

wavelength, shutting down public places of worship and instructing Muslims to pray in their homes.

When the number of COVID-19 cases dropped and mosques began to open, many precautions and standard operating procedures were implemented, such as performing prayers with the separation of one metre from each other, restricting the number of people to be in the premises, and allowing only a limited duration of time to stay in mosques. These new normal guidelines or restrictions of mosques were accepted by many, and at the same time have also caused some arguments among the public.

The Roles of Mosques and the Religious Authorities During COVID-19

Religious authorities have a significant role in public compliance with COVID-19 prevention efforts, particularly in and beyond religious spaces. This is due to the fact that religious leaders and institutions have a substantial influence on the health-related activities given in their congregations (Baruth et al., 2015; Bopp et al., 2013). The effectiveness of the role played by the religious authorities is normally enhanced when they are supported and strengthened by the ruling government.

In the case of Malaysia, the Malaysian National Committee of Islamic Religious Council organised a meeting to decide on Islamic religious gatherings particularly in congregational prayers and Friday prayers. The decision of the meeting was presented to the Royal Highness Yang di-Pertuan Agong for approval as religious matters are a jurisdiction of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Sultans at the federal and state level respectively (Aziz et al., 2021). Based on the decision made, the government has decided to restrict mass gatherings including religious activities, for example, Friday prayer, congregational prayer, and religious events in mosques.

The fatwa was released to the public to inform, justify the decision and educate them on the matter. The office of the Mufti of the federal territory, for example, released their fatwa relating to a mass gathering in mosques on their website and social media in dual languages Malay language and English language with the aim to reach the mass public. The prevention measure was also implemented in all the states in Malaysia, as a response to the direction provided by the Federal government. Mosques and surau authorities were also advised to perform proper sanitization and practise the standard operating procedure recommended by the Ministry of Health (Malay Mail, 2021). Any institutions which neglected the standard operating procedures would be

subjected to fine and legal implications of the Movement Control Orders (Majlis Keselamatan Negara, 2022).

The prohibition of the mass gathering was also based on advice from the Ministry of Health, to avoid infections or spread of COVID-19. The Ministry of Health advised the public not to attend any program or events which involve the gathering of people at crowded places even if it involves religious activities. People are to practise social distancing by staying at least one metre away when meeting with other people and people with symptoms should take precautions by practising self-quarantine. In some situations, when congregational prayers are allowed with strict conditions, the congregations are to scan the MYSejahtera mobile application when entering the mosques, and vaccinations are expected for those who want to join the congregational prayers. (Malay Mail, 2021)

In the context of Brunei, His Royal Highness the Sultan's approval, the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (MUIB) and Government Mufti Fatwa (Number 20-2020) decided on the temporary closure of all mosques, *musolla*, and worship halls in the country. Likewise in Malaysia, this decision was also made based on the Ministry of Health's advice and Shariah viewpoints. Furthermore, the religious institutions in Brunei collaborated with other government ministries to guarantee that religious activities continued in different channels such as television and radio. For example, the Ministry of Religious Affairs hosted an online 'Night of *Munajat*' programme every Saturday between Maghrib and Isha prayer with the recitation of *Yaasin*, *doa*, *zikir*, and *Ratib al-Attas*. The public was invited to join and follow after performing their Maghrib obligatory prayers, as well as the *Hajat* and *Taubat* prayers at their houses. The event was led by the Minister of Religious Affairs and attended by the Ministers (Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama, Negara Brunei Darussalam, 2020).

His Royal Highness as the highest authority in religious matters addressed the COVID-19 issue on the commencement of Ramadan which stressed the importance of science and faith in tackling the disease. He said, "*I believe this because of the combined preventative measures and also because of prayer*". His Majesty emphasized that the virus was sent by God and Muslims must observe social distancing standards, maintain cleanliness, strengthen their prayers, and Quran recitation (Hayat, 2021). Same as the practice of the Malaysian government, Brunei's Ministry of Health also followed World Health Organization guidelines which include social distancing and self-isolation, as well as contact tracing via the Sultanate's Bruhealth mobile application.

Even though the religious gatherings are restricted in Malaysia and Brunei, the mosque personnel are allowed to air the call for prayer (*azan*) and establish congregations with a few mosque personnel, as well as to air the recording of al-Quran recitations. Nevertheless, the national media in both countries broadcast the *doa* recitation on television and radio, asking for God's protection with regards to COVID-19. Various programmes on television and radios were organised involving Islamic content with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. In sum, even though the mosques in Malaysia and Brunei are closed to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic, the religious institutions continue to perform their religious responsibilities by following the standard operating procedures and maintaining the management of the mosques. Religious activities such as the Quran recitation session and *tazkirah*, which are traditionally done in mosques, are still carried out and conducted online by mosque congregation members. This has opened another opportunity for members of the mosque to use technology in facilitating worship, spreading *da'wah*, and educating the public on Islamic teachings.

Religious Justification on the Restriction of Mosques During Pandemic

The decision to postpone religious gatherings at mosques in Brunei and Malaysia during the pandemic is the response to the need to protect the people's life and the safety measures to cease the spread of COVID-19. The religious authorities deliberated the fatwa with guidance of classical Islamic references with the advice of medical experts of COVID-19 and public health.

Many Islamic organizations issued their fatwa related to restricting the role of mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the International Association of Muslim Scholars, the Fatwa Council of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, Kuwait Ministry Of Awqaf And Islamic Affairs, Ministry Of Islamic Religious Affairs And Mufti of the Republic Of Tunisia, Syeikh 'Uthman Battikh, Islamic Fiqh Academy, Syrian Ministry Of Awqaf And Sham Scholars Union, Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura and Al-Azhar's Council of Senior Scholars (ACSS) (Mufti Office of Wilayah Persekutuan, 2020).

The ACSS provides three important suggestions related to the postponement of religious gatherings in mosques. First, it is obligatory to call for prayer for each time of prayer, and it is permitted for the muezzin to say " صَلُّوا فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ " in each the call for prayer wherever Friday and congregational prayers are not permitted in the mosques. Second, Muslims are advised to perform congregational prayer in the house since congregational prayer is not limited to the mosque. Third,

every citizen must follow the Ministry of Health's orders, recommendations, and instructions in order to prevent the virus's spread and the worst condition of the pandemic in the country (Mufti Office of Wilayah Persekutuan, 2020). Malaysia and Brunei have also adhered to these three matters in their postponement of religious gatherings in mosques.

The suspension of the religious gathering in mosques was made based on religious justifications that suit the Maqasid Shariah which is the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*) in response to the situation of COVID-19 in the country. The Maqasid al-Shariah, as according to Muslim jurists, focuses on the objectives of the main principles that the Islamic legal system's rules are designed to uphold. This is aligned with the purpose of the Shariah is to realize public welfare and to prevent public harm as best as possible (Kamali, 1999). In this context, clearly the rationale of restricting mass gathering is to evade the possibility of harm and destruction in a society. This is aligned with the Islamic jurisprudence of لا ضرر ولا ضرار which indicates that *there should be no harm nor reciprocating harm* (Sunan Ibn Majah, 2341). Furthermore, al-Quran stated that it is forbidden for a person to purposefully push himself into destruction by failing to take the necessary precautions;

وَلَا تُؤْثِرُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ

(Surah al-Baqarah, verse 195)

Meaning: And make not your own hands contribute to your destruction (Translation from Yusuf Ali, 1946).

Apart from the general guidelines in the al-Quran, al-Sunnah, and Maqasid Shariah, the method to prevent infectious illness specifically was mentioned by the Prophet PBUH. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH mentioned about prevention to enter the land which is infected by the plague which is also a contagious disease in his era;

إذا سمعتم الطاعون بأرض، فلا تدخلوها، وإذا وقع بأرض، وأنتم فيها، فلا تخرجوا منها

(Sahih Muslim, n.d.)

Meaning: If you get wind of the outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; and if it breaks out in a land in which you are, do not leave it. (Translation from <https://sunnah.com/muslim>, n.d.)

Prophet PBUH also said in a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah:

وَفَرَّ مِنَ الْمَجْدُومِ كَمَا تَفِرُّ مِنَ الْأَسَدِ

(Sahih al-Bukhari, 2002)

Meaning: and one should run away from the leper as one runs away from a lion

(Translation from <https://sunnah.com/muslim>, n.d.).

To put all these arguments into perspective, the prevention measures ordered by the authorities are mandatory to be obeyed and abided by the people. This is clearly illustrated in the al-Quran, as Allah SWT said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِن تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۚ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا

(Surah al-Nisaa', verse 59)

Meaning: O ye who believe! obey God and obey the Apostle and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Apostle if ye do believe in God and the Last Day: that is best and most suitable for final determination (Translation from Yusuf Ali, 1946).

Hence, the religious authorities make the decision based on various and concrete evidence in classical Islamic sources, Maqasid Shariah, and the expert opinions of the local authorities and medical health experts. However, this does not prevent any debate and discourse that emerged discussing the role of the mosque as a religious space during the pandemic and the need to uphold congregational prayers in mosques.

There are three major clusters of differing opinions on the arguments, which are the groups who accepted, rejected, and partially accepted the new regulations. The arguments, both in Malaysia or Brunei, have nonetheless happened in peaceful ways and mostly occurred due to some members of the public failing to comprehend the justification behind the new rulings related to the worship restriction in mosques during the pandemic. However, we believe both countries and their religious authorities have played their roles in deliberating the issue and communicating their policies and guidelines on various platforms including through online and offline channels.

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CONCLUSION

Drawing from the Malaysian and Brunei experiences, we reason that the role and functions of mosques as a religious space during the COVID-19 pandemic have changed tremendously to respond to public health and safety. However, the changes have not deviated from the essence of the Maqasid al-Shariah as outlined in the classical Islamic sources. Based on evidence presented earlier, we believe that the roles of government and religious authorities are pertinent in making the changes in especially communicating with and educating the public.

This has also indicated that the restrictions of mosques are a momentous occasion in public policy and theology, which may also be described as a remarkable interaction between religious tradition and modernity on a deeper level (Al-Astewani, 2021). The interactions, indeed, require a complex understanding of Shariah, the proactive and responsive policies from the ruling governments, and the public participations which are the main stakeholders that implement the proposed policies and guidelines of mosques during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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