Focus: Commemorating Prophet Muhammad’s Birthday
(Which fell on 24 January 2013)

Muhammad (pbuh) was the posthumous son of Abdullah and his wife Aaminah among the nobility of the Quraish tribe of Mecca whose line of descent reaches Prophet Ishmael, son of Prophet Abraham. Born in 570 AD his mother died when he was six and he was brought up by his paternal grandfather, Abdul Mutalib, and uncle Abu Talib. He was nursed by Halimah who took the young Muhammad to her desert home for two years. (More p. 3)

ARTICLES

Deadly Drones in Hands of Trigger-Happy Americans
by Daud Abdul-Fattah Batchelor
The United States has the largest military expenditure greater than the rest of the world combined, the highest number of prisoners per capita, and scored 88th out of 158 countries in the 2012 ‘Global Peace Index’. This militarised population with the largest private gun ownership in the world has had 62 mass shootings since 1982, with 2012 its most violent year on record. (More p. 4)

Defining the Reviver: Analysis of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi’s Fatwa
by Mohammed Farid Ali
An anonymous questioner asked Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905) about the reviver (al-mujaddid). The question and Shaykh’s answer are recorded in Ta’lifat Rashidiyyah, an ontological work compiling fatawa and treatises written by Gangohi in Arabic, Urdu, and Persian. Rashid Ahmad was from Gangoh a small town in Saharanpur, India. (More p. 6)

Challenges of Islam in Bangladesh
by Tawfique Al-Mubarak
Bengal – the name popularly known to the world before it was renamed as Bangladesh – experienced Islam for the first time in history around the year 620 CE, which is around the 10th year of the advent of Islam. Reports indicate that some of the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) travelled from Ethiopia towards China in the seventh year of prophethood, and that they stopped over at the port of Chittagong. (More p. 7)

Mak Yong Revisited: Islamisation of Ancient Culture
by Sheila Ainon Yusof
“Mak Yong” an ancient dance-theatre which originated from the Pattani Kingdom (now in Thailand) is a comprehensive theatre performance combining dance, opera, drama and comedy. Due to its animist and Hindu-Buddhist roots it was banned by the Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party in 1991. It was however registered as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005. (More p. 11)

SEMINAR / EVENT REPORTS

Research Fellow Seminar, 13 February 2013
Third Abdullah Yusuf Ali Memorial Lecture
Visit by Professor Mumtaz Ahmad
Focus: Commemorating Prophet Muhammad’s Birthday

(Which fell on 24 January 2013)

by Mohammad Hashim Kamali
(contd from page 1)

At the age of nine, Muhammad exhibited indications of an intelligent and inquiring mind. He was reflective and loved solitary meditation. At the age of 12, he was taken by his loving uncle Abu Talib on a mercantile journey to Sham and Bazrah. It was at Bazrah that they met the Christian monk Buhaira, who is related to have told Abu Talib to take good care of his nephew as great dignity awaited him. All accounts of Muhammad’s personality concur on ascribing to him correctness of manner, purity of morals and dignified bearing, which won him the approbation of Meccan society that soon conferred on him the title al-Amin (the trustworthy).

Between 580-590, war broke out between Quraish and Banu Hazin tribes, which lasted ten years, and in two of these years Muhammad accompanied Abu Talib. He also took interest in business and visited local fairs in and around Mecca. At twenty-five years of age, on Abu Talib’s recommendation, he entered the service of Khadijah, an affluent widow of forty-five who had two sons and a daughter from her former marriage. Muhammad was placed in charge of Khadijah’s mercantile operations, and he again travelled the route to Bazrah. Having proved himself successful in Khadijah’s business, he was soon rewarded with her hand in marriage.

At the age of 40 when on a meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. He continued receiving revelations for twenty-three years, which became known as the Qur’an. As soon as he began to propagate his mission, he and his small group of followers became targets of bitter hostility and persecution of the Meccans, which compelled them to leave their hometown in 622 AD. This event, the Hijra, ‘migration’, marked the Prophet’s departure for Madinah, some 260 kilometres to the north, and the beginning also of a great transformation in the life of the nascent community of Muslims. After eight years, the Prophet and his followers triumphantly returned to Mecca, where they forgave their enemies, and established Islam in the whole of Arabia.

The Prophet was of fair complexion with definitive facial features, broad shouldered, average in height and weight. He spoke with clarity and pause. When he turned his face, he did so with the whole of his body, and when pointing at something, he did so with the whole of his hand. He would sit as one that was always ready to rise, and sat as one among equals. Whenever he had the choice between two matters, he would choose the easier. He did not take revenge excepting where the honour of God was concerned. When angry, he would avert his gaze, look downwards yet joyful. He smiled often, showed affection to children, and reverence to the elderly. He walked fast such that keeping pace with him was an effort. As a parent and friend, he was loyal, endowed with humility and gentleness, exceptionally generous.

The Prophet’s marriage to Khadijah was “happy, fortunate and fruitful,” until her death at age 65. Two sons and four daughters were born to them, but both their sons died, and the Prophet mourned the loss of his only son, who was Khadijah’s only child. Khadijah was his only wife. She was “his counsellor and support, and his grief at her death at first was inconceivable.” The fact that he had many wives is undisputed, but he was not licentious. Abraham, David, Solomon and many other Prophets and saints of the Old Testament also had many wives — none were licentious. Many of his marriages were for protection of widows whose husbands had died in the cause of Islam. T. P. Hughes, author of Dictionary of Islam, quoted Thomas Carlyle, who wrote: “Mohammad was not a sensual man: we shall err widely if we consider him otherwise. His household was the frugaldest, his common diet barely bread and water; sometimes for a month, there was not once a fire lighted on his hearth... He would mend his own shoes, patch his own cloak, a hard toiling man, careless of what vulgar men toll for. No emperor with his dignity was obeyed as this man in a cloak of his own clotting.”

Till the third day before his death, he regularly led congregational prayers. When he was too ill to enter the mosque, he ordered his faithful friend, Abu Bakr, to lead the service. On his last attendance, the Prophet addressed the congregation: “Men and brethren! If I have caused any of you to be unjustly scourged, I here submit my own shoulder to the lash of retaliation. If I have...”
...a mass of detail in the early sources show that Muhammad was an honest and upright man who had gained the respect and loyalty of others who were like-wise honest and upright men."

"Muhammad is the most successful of all Prophets and religious personalities."

-Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 12

"He was by far the most remarkable man that ever set foot on this earth."

He preached a religion, founded a state, built a nation, laid down a moral code, initiated numerous social and civilizational reforms.

"He established a powerful and dynamic society to practise and represent his teachings and completely revolutionised the worlds of human thought and behaviour for all times to come."

-Sir George Bernard Shaw in "The Genuine Islam," vol. 1, no. 8, 1936

"The league of nations founded by the Prophet of Islam put the principle of international unity and human brotherhood on such universal foundations as to show a candle to other nations."

"The fact is that no nation of the world can show a parallel to what Islam has done towards the realization of the idea of the League of Nations."

-Professor Snouk Hurgronje

The Prophet died on 8th June 632 at the age of 63. Among the Prophet’s greatest achievements was to instil a new monotheistic moral code that departed from the pagan Arab’s reliance on tribalism and ancestral practice as criteria of moral life. The very simplicity of his calling to faith in only One God worthy of worship was also a reason for the rapid spread of his mission. With few means, a man who had been an orphan and who had suffered in countless ways, laid the foundations of a new religious society and civilisation that was soon to make its mark upon a large portion of the world and began a new chapter in human history.
by Mohammed Farid Ali
(contd from page 1)

Rashid Ahmad Gangohi was the second patron of Darul Uloom Deoband. Deoband’s entourage of Fatawa started with him. The following is the question and the answer:

Question: In the hadith reported by Abu Daud “Surely, Allah will send for this ummah at the advent (ra`i) of every one hundred years a person who will revive its religion for the ummah.” (Sunan Abu Daud, hadith no. 4291): What does ra`i mean? Does it mean end of the century or starting of the century? What are the signs of the reviver by which he can be recognised? Is the reviver for the whole world or for any place where revival is needed? Is Muhammad or Ahmad necessary to be part of his name? Who are the revivers of 1300 A.H. and where to be part of his name? Who are the people basing on the wording of the hadith reported by Abu Daud understand that the mujaddid of a century have to be specifically recognised by their special signs. Some believe that the mujaddids are infallible like the Prophets. Mufri Muhammad Taqi Usmani was asked a similar question. In answer he drew guidelines to avoid such misconceptions in relation to mujaddid. These guidelines further elaborate the foresaid answer of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi: 1) Mujaddid is not a formal designation like prophet or messenger; 2) A true mujaddid does not declare himself as such; 3) There is no religious obligation to believe in someone as a mujaddid; 4) There is no revelation to the mujaddid from Allah like a prophet receives; 5) It is not necessary that a mujaddid knows himself to be one of them; and 6) A mujaddid is not infallible like a prophet.

Rashid Ahmad Sahanpuri in a commentary on the hadith in line with his Shaykh Rashid Ahmad Gangohi preferred the idea of numerous mujaddids in one century, each reviving the teachings of Islam according to his forge. He wrote that a scholar of one science is not a reviver of other sciences. For instance not many hadith-scholars achieve revival of figh-matters. Furthermore the word “man (who)” in the foresaid hadith does not connote a specific person in Arabic language which keeps the number of mujaddids open.

Analogue: Even though the question is simple, it still catches the general misconceptions held by many. Many people basing on the wording of the hadith reported by Abu Daud understand that the mujaddids of a century have to be specifically recognized by their special signs. Some believe that the mujaddids are infallible like the Prophets. Mufri Muhammad Taqi Usmani was asked a similar question. In answer he drew guidelines to avoid such misconceptions in relation to mujaddid. These guidelines further elaborate the foresaid answer of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi: 1) Mujaddid is not a formal designation like prophet or messenger; 2) A true mujaddid does not declare himself as such; 3) There is no religious obligation to believe in someone as a mujaddid; 4) There is no revelation to the mujaddid from Allah like a prophet receives; 5) It is not necessary that a mujaddid knows himself to be one of them; and 6) A mujaddid is not infallible like a prophet.

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by Tawfiq Al-Mubarak
(contd from page 1)

Reports indicate that some of the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) including Sа`d ibn Abi Waqqas and Malik ibn Wuhbaib (R.A.), travelled from Ethiopia towards China in the seventh year of Muhammad prophethood, and during their nine years-long journey by sea they stopped over at the port of Chittagong. Many locals accepted Islam there.

The first political opening (fith) of Islam in Bengal was by the Khilji dynasty in 1203 AD. This was followed by Muslim immigrants, traders, businessmen, ‘ulama’, as well sijf sheikhs. Madrasahs were established, khanqas set up, and mosques and madrasahs were built for the propagation of Islamic knowledge.

Challenges of Islam in Bangladesh

The challenges that Islam currently faces towards its development are manifold. The first is the issue of unity and unifying the ‘ulama’ with one spirit. Second is to sustain the spirit of original scholarship in the local language, such that it can rise to meet the ongoing challenges of modernity and secularisation.

The challenges that Islam currently faces towards its development are manifold. The first is the issue of unity and unifying the ‘ulama’ with one spirit. Second is to sustain the spirit of original scholarship in the local language, such that it can rise to meet the ongoing challenges of modernity and secularisation.

Islam is ingrained into the psyche of Bangladeshi Muslims and the desire to see Islamic scholarship and scholars emerging is quite promising. A fresh focus is necessary from religious and political leaders to guide the people towards the right path for Islam to flourish.

Professor Kamalí’s books to appear in Arabic translation

The Islamic Text Society (ITS) of Cambridge, UK has published a number of Professor Kamali’s books over the years. As of August 2012, the Beirut-based Arab Network for Research and Publishing has signed an agreement with the ITS to translate eight of Professor Kamali’s books into Arabic. Seven of these are on fundamental rights and liberties in Islam, plus his Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence. This is over 2,500 pages of English text that will be made available in Arabic as a result of this welcome development.

Hikmah

The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr.

- Hadith

It is enough of a sin for a man to relate all of what he hears.

- Hadith

Contentment is a wealth which will not deplete.

- Hadith

Do not be too hard, lest you be broken; do not be too soft, lest you be squeezed.

- Ali b. Abi Talib

Everyone has been made for some particular work, and the desire for that work has been put in every heart.

- Rumi

January - February 2013

January - February 2013
RESEARCH, PUBLICATION AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali published two articles, one on “Islam prohibits all forms of corruption”, and another on “Remembering Prophet’s greatness in simplicity” in the New Straits Times on 19 and 24 January 2013, respectively. He continued with various presentations as speaker or discussant at conferences and forums within Kuala Lumpur and outside IAIS Malaysia. He is currently finalising an IAIS Policy Issue Paper on ‘Family Empowerment’ and working on an enhancement and revision of his two written works, “The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam” and “Maqasid al-Shariat”, for international publication. He is also editing two books that IAIS is publishing jointly with Kube Publishing of UK, one on Suku, the other on Islamic Transactions.

Dr Karim Douglas Crow continues to pursue his research into Faith and Rationality in relation to modernity, as well as into the ethical and spiritual consequences of material consumption by middle class Muslims; and continues as Managing Editor of Islam and Civilisational Renewal. His book: The Hashwīyah: Radical Muslim Traditionalism is due to be published by the Islamic Book Trust (Kuala Lumpur).

Dr Daud Batchelor acted as Moderator at the Sa’id Nursi International Conference on the Role of Science & Art in (Islamic) Civilisational Renewal, held at IAIS on 4th December 2012. As New Straits Times columnist, Dr Daud had his article “Wealth is Not an End in Itself” published on 1st January 2013. Daud’s article titled, “A Proposed New Islamic Rating Index of Well-being for Muslim Countries” is planned for publication in Islam and Civilisational Renewal, Volume 4 Number 2 (April 2013). Dr Daud was a speaker at the IAIS Research Fellow Seminar on 13 February.

Michael K. Scott was engaged with reading, editing, and revising of material submitted to ICRC as well as researching possible submission topics and contributors. This includes preparing and checking all ICRC contributions and participation in all ICRC editorial planning meetings; drafting letters and advertisements to promote subscriptions to the journal. In addition he is translating a booklet on Islamic Finance for the Islamic Development Bank, from the original Arabic to English.

Abdul Karim Abdullah @ Leslie Terebossy is currently working on a paper for the ICR, entitled “Risk transfer, risk sharing, and risk management.” He is also preparing additional short pieces for the Website on Islamic Finance. In addition, he is preparing an ICR Occasional Paper on “Profit and loss sharing: the flagship of Islamic finance.”


Tawfiq al-Mubarak submitted a chapter on the ‘Parameters for the Use of Hiyal in Contemporary Islamic Financial Contacts’ for the book Islamic Transactions and Finance: Principles and Developments being edited by Prof Kamali and Sheila Aimon. He also joined the team with Prof Kamali and Dr Farid Ali for the book on Shariah Objectives (Maqasid al-Shari’ah) in Financial Transactions and Contracts. At the same time, he is working on a paper on surrogacy in Islamic law, expecting to contribute to the upcoming ICR, and another manuscript on “An Alternative Approach for Poverty Alleviation (AAPA) Model” for The Durham Conference on Poverty Alleviation and Islamic Economics & Finance.

Sheila Aimon Yussof published an article on prospects of a common internal shariah audit framework for Islamic financial institutions in Malaysia in ICR in January 2013; chaired the Research Fellow Seminar in January 2013; is currently preparing Policy Issue Paper No. 2 on the Family institution; and also working on the IAS book on ‘Islamic Transactions & Finance: Principles & Developments’. She contributed an article on art and culture.

Tengku Ahmad Hazi continues his research on constitutionalism in Islam, focusing on post-Westphalian strands unleashed by globalisation, international human rights norms, and the diffusion of centres of power (both domestically and globally); and the impact these have on the rule of law in the Muslim world. He is also helping Prof Kamali with his book on the maqasid al-shari’ah and has been editing a Malay translation of Prof Kamali’s monograph, Moderation and Balance in Islam: the Quranic Principle of Wasatiyyah. He is also engaged in policy research on education and family-related issues and contributes to the ICR, Bulletin and IAIS website.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (ICRC VOLUME 4 NUMBER 1)

Anthony H. John – Al-Ghazali and the Foundations of an Islamic Humanism

- Creative development which avoids innovation can be made possible by carefully distinguishing between legal provision and attendant circumstances.
- Ghazali maintains the sanctity and authority of the Law, but frees Muslims from imposition of unnecessary legal constraints. Awareness of this freedom should be strengthened and heeded.
- Ghazali demonstrates the space in Islam for a Humanist tradition, one which values all secular human activities within the Law and sees in them the potential for advancing spiritual life. This forms an essential basis for reviving Islam’s reason for being.

Meganavi Mori – Making Knowledge Useful: Applying al-Ghazali’s Teachings in the Malay World

- Universities in the region and in Malaysia in particular, must cooperate to “de-Westernise” and move to redefine higher education and the knowledge they provide by forming their own worldviews and developing indigenous knowledge.
- Knowledge and research by the higher learning institutions must benefit people and address local issues.
- An environment of empowerment should be created where youths and students are encouraged to debate, speak freely and be recognised.
- Sean Foley – Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union, and Modern Islam

- Exchanges between the Kingdom, Russia, and Muslim majority regimes of Central Asia should be reviewed in light of changing regional realities.
- Research, cultural and religious reciprocity, and historical and sociological collaboration should be promoted between Russia and the Kingdom, in order to promote the best interests of both nations in the context of the Muslim peoples in Russia.
- Mutual academic and policy institutions might be established as a mark of recognising these strategic shifts and preparing for future contingencies: Russian and Central Asian studies in the Kingdom, and Saudi and Gulf studies in Russia.

Abdul Karim Abdullah – The Pitfalls of Riba or Interest-Based Financing

- Awareness needs to be created that interest-based financing adversely impacts every sector by causing a range of inefficiencies in the economy.
- Awareness also needs to be created about the destabilising effects of interest-based financing, in particular, the link between this mode of financing and cyclical instability. This is a compelling reason for abandoning interest-based financing in favour of profit and loss sharing.
- The dangers of going into debt need to be widely publicised while its alternatives explored.
- The discourse of finance needs to be revisited to ensure that the terminology used reflects the economy of the real sector and that key drivers (incentives) of economic activity are properly understood.
- Interest-based financing needs to be phased out and replaced with financing based on the basis of profit and loss sharing.

Sheila Aimon Yussof – Prospects of a Shariah Audit Framework for Islamic Financial Institutions in Malaysia

- The Shariah audit is still uncharted territory, it is recommended that the Central Bank of Malaysia undertake this task by providing the benchmarks and standards required for an efficient and effective Internal Shariah Audit Framework.
- Islamic financial institutions (IFIs) in Malaysia should establish a Shariah-specific Audit Charter that will reflect the Shariah “mission” in their organisation’s vision of the scope, purpose, authority, accountability and responsibility for the internal Shariah auditing department.
- A comprehensive Talent Development Programme needs to be designed for internal Shariah auditors, Shariah reviewers and Shariah advisors for skill training. This will widen the pool of expertise and prevent poaching of internal auditors within the industry.
- A Professional Practice Code for Shariah Auditors should be developed to govern the profession of auditing (covering internal and external auditors) and ensuring uniformity in audit practice.
- On Audit Reports, IFIs in Malaysia may consider reporting the Shariah audit findings as a separate statement in their annual report to promote greater transparency in Shariah compliance.

Fahm AbudKafar Okwale – Islamic Ethics and Stem Cell Research

- Islamic ethical guidelines should be formulated to assist Muslim scientists in applying Islamic ethical principles to various medical problems, especially as they affect the dignity and totality of the human person.
- The Islamic ethical principle of moderation (wasatiyyah) should be applied to all stem cell applications. The current debate on stem cell research wavers between extreme positions: the embryo is either a person or a property. The way forward sees the embryo rather as a developing form of human life though not a complete person, thus worthy of a high degree of respect.
- A well formulated biomedical ethical theory that is also informed by Islamic ethical principles is needed to advance stem cell research. It will guide physicians and researchers alike in striking a balance as well as a morally acceptable foundation in difficult medical cases.
- Stem cell therapy as a new medical treatment should be allowed because the benefits for people suffering from various ailments are greater than the harm.
Life along Jalan Universiti resumed its normal busy pace after the Chinese New Year when over one hundred guests found their way to the IAIS-Malaysia Conference Hall to attend the Third Abdullah Yusuf Ali Memorial Lecture Series. IAIS-Malaysia’s regular collaborating partner in publishing, the Islamic Book Trust (IBT), honored the revered scholar best known for his 1934 English translation of and commentary on the Qur’an, now a standard reference in mosques and homes throughout the English-speaking Muslim world.

This year’s event occasioned IBT’s launch of its Malaysian edition of Abrogation in the Qur’an and Islamic Law: A Critical Study of the Concept of Naskh and its Impact – a work by Dr. Louay Fatoohi, British scientist and Islamic studies scholar of Iraqi origin (http://www.louayfatoohi.com/). Dr Fatoohi drew upon his latest research for this book to address the topic of naskh, or abrogation, in a fascinating and provocative lecture entitled “Is the Mus-haf a complete record of the Qur’an? The controversy of abrogation”.

Dr Fatoohi clarified from the outset of his remarks that while many Muslims use the terms “Qur’an” and “mus-haf” interchangeably, in fact the term “Qur’an” stands for the verses that God revealed to Prophet Muhammad over 22 years, and the “mus-haf” is the written record these revelations as they were compiled and written down. While a number of Hadith narrators suggest that the mus-haf does not contain all of the Qur’anic verses, and that some verses and even complete chapters (surahs) of the Qur’an had been “withdrawn” by God during the life of the Prophet, Dr Fatoohi concluded that the abrogation narratives were not authentic. For more information and to obtain a copy of Dr Fatoohi’s book, please see: http://www.ibtbooks.com/lecture/programme.php. 

**Visit by Professor Mumtaz Ahmad**

by Tengku Ahmad Hazi

On 5 February 2013, IAIS Malaysia received a courtesy visit by Professor Mumtaz Ahmad, Executive Director of the Iqbal International Institute for Research and Dialogue (IRD), Islamabad, Pakistan and former Vice Chancellor (Academic) of the International Islamic University of Islamabad (IIUI). During the meeting Prof. Mumtaz and IAIS researchers exchanged views about the present state of the Muslim world. Prof. Mumtaz recently edited a book critically examining the state of Islamic Studies in the United States entitled Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2012). Yet such an endeavour he argued, is even more urgent in the Muslim world itself, for the very criticisms raised in the book with respect to Islamic Studies in the US are equally applicable to the Muslim world. He also discussed prospects for further collaboration with IAIS and requested a contribution from Professor Kamali towards the IRD Series in Contemporary Islamic Thought, which thus far includes contributions by Chandra Muzaffar, Khalid Masud, Ali Mazrui, Tariq Ramadan and Seyyed Hossein Nast.

**Research Fellow Seminar, 13 February 2013**

by Tengku Ahmad Hazi

On 13 February 2013, IAIS Malaysia organised a Research Fellow Seminar (RFS) featuring two speakers, Dr Daud Abdullah/Farhat Batchelor, Associate Fellow at IAIS Malaysia, and Mr John Hartley, a sociologist and PhD candidate at Yale University, USA.

Daud Batchelor, in his presentation, Developing a Political Framework favorable for Peace in Post-Pullout Afghanistan argued that the prerequisites for a politically stable Afghanistan are functioning state institutions (necessitating review of the role and powers of the President, National Assembly and judiciary), resolution of legally and constitutionally divisive issues, and generous sustained foreign assistance. With the planned withdrawal of NATO troops by the end of 2014, the Afghans are left with questions of security and sovereignty, particularly in negotiating with the Taliban. Free and fair elections need to be held in 2014 (mindful especially that Hamid Karzai may exercise considerable influence) despite Taliban’s opposition. The grievances of the Taliban may halt any prospect towards negotiation (partly because they are not represented and lack either a strong political wing or coherent leadership) but this in the end may backfire on the Taliban as it may lose its Pashun support-base. Batchelor then recommended that the Taliban form a political party to effectively present its policies.

John Hartley, presenting on The Concept of Religious Exclusivism: Religious Exclusivists taking Inclusive Action? gave a sociological account of a key religious question, “who attains to salvation?” (or its variant, “do members of other religions get saved?”), and the impact the answer has on the believer’s relationship with the Other (i.e. believers of other religions or non-believers, as well as on the sense of loyalty to non-religious organisations which the believer may belong to. But scholarly discourses turn out to be diverse: an ‘exclusive’ belief may nonetheless result in extremely ‘inclusive’ action, for instance, which thus means conventional binaries (e.g. traditional vs. modern) should be methodologically avoided.

Both of these are research projects and as is the usual practice of Research Fellow Seminar, the researchers introduced their on-going research for further discussion. Various aspects of both proposals were discussed by those present.

**Event Reports**

**Third Annual Abdullah Yusuf Ali Memorial Lecture Packs the IAIS-Malaysia Conference Hall**

by Michael K. Scott

“Mak Yong” an ancient dance-theatre which originated from the Pattani Kingdom (now in Thailand) is a comprehensive theatre performance combining dance, opera, drama and comedy. Due to its animist and Hindu-Buddhist roots it was banned by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party in 1991. It was however registered as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005.

In the old days, mak yong was performed right after the village people got the last crop before the rains (panen). The mak yong dance combines elements of rituals, as well as stylised acting and dancing, vocal and instrumental music, songs, stories and colloquialisms without using texts. Mak yong performances revolve around 12 Malay legendary stories. They formally would begin their performance by paying respect to the spirits (semah kumpung) with an offering. This was followed by dancing, acting and improvised dialogues. Stories were presented in a series of three hour performances over several nights. The mak yong orchestra is small with the main instruments played being the three-strunged spiked lute, drum (gendang) and a pair of gongs. It may also include the flute (serunai), kenduk drums and small cymbals (kele). The Kelantan government has recently been urged to review its prohibition on mak yong. A mak yong activist asserts that there was no longer any element of worship in the dance-drama:

“We now start the dance with doa selamat and take out any elements of worship used in the past. We require both males and females to take part in the dance to act out all the characters. The musicians are all men.”

She pointed out those performances such as menora, wayang kulit, and wayu thai were allowed albeit with some modifications.

So what is this fascination with mak yong? Should it be banned totally or should the traditional form of dance drama be allowed to flourish in its pure form but Islamised due to its cultural significance and heritage of Malaysia? The public responded as follows:

To ban the artform would mean a loss to Kelantanese cultural identity and traditional heritage. If the decision to ban the artform was due to the Mak Yong’s storyline, they could suggest the performers to come up with a religious storyline instead, such as the story of ‘Ibna Mi’raj’, the night Muhammad PBUH ascended to heaven on Buraq.

**Today there are less than ten veteran mak yong performers. Although attempts are made to revive the art form, the younger generation of enthusiasts are not willing to undergo the rigorous apprenticeship. The art appears to be on a decline. But there is hope yet for mak yong as the Department of National Heritage has taken positive steps towards the preservation of the Mak Yong Theatre to prevent this ancient culture from becoming extinct.**

**MAK YONG REVISITED: ISLAMISATION OF ANCIENT CULTURE**

by Sheila Atin Yusof
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Professor Mumtaz Ahmad shared his views about the present state of the Muslim world.

Dr Daud Batchelor delivered a presentation on *Developing a Political Framework favorable for Peace in Post-Pullout Afghanistan*.

Mr John Hartley presented on *The Concept of Religious Exclusivism: Religious Exclusivists taking Inclusive Action?*.

Tengku Ahmad Hazri

Michael K Scott

Sheila Ainon Yussof

Dr Louay Fatoohi gave his lecture *Is the Mushaf a complete record of the Qur’an? The Controversy of Abrogation*.

Question and Answer session at the *Abdullah Yusuf Ali Memorial Lecture*.

Participants at the *Abdullah Yusuf Ali Memorial Lecture*.

Introductory remarks by Hishamudin Ubaidulla.

Dr Ahmad Farouk Musa of Islamic Renaissance Front.