

the influence of Islamic culture has slowly diminished. He further discussed the feasibility of passing a new blasphemy law in Bangladesh, which was demanded by the Hefazat-e-Islam in response to some anti-Islamic bloggers. Remarking on the blasphemy law, Professor Bari thinks that the existing 1927 Amendment of the Penal Code could be enhanced to protect any contempt of religion.

Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Dr Aminul Karim believes that the current crisis in Bangladeshi politics is the result of artificially constructed divisions in the psyche of Bangladeshi Muslims. Bangladesh is a homogenous state, and artificially constructed divisions should not compromise national interest. He concluded by suggesting that *ummatic* bonding should unite Bangladesh with other Muslim states. Raimi Abdul Rahim from Global Peace Malaysia spoke on the mutual ties between Malaysia and Bangladesh and Malaysia's role in enhancing the good relationship. He also briefed participants on the ongoing political tensions and issues in Bangladesh. Raimi's suggestion to overcome these tensions was to dissolve the ICT and hold a fresh trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

International Seminar on Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Problem? (6 April 2013, IAIS Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur)

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia

On 6 April 2013, IAIS Malaysia and the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) co-organised an International Seminar on "Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Problem?" There was consensus among the speakers that the Qur'an and Sunnah prescribe no *form* of government but insist on commitment to principles such as justice ('*adl*) and welfare (*maslahah*), thus implying the "compatibility" of democracy with Islam. Prof Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Founding Chairman and CEO, IAIS Malaysia) in his keynote address drew attention to the institutions of democracy, seeing in them prospects for the crystallisation of Qur'anic principles of consultation (*shura*), consensus (*ijma'*) and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*).

Dr Syed Farid Alatas (National University of Singapore) cautioned against the idealisation of democracy and the disproportionate emphasis on the ideal itself. Democracy means more than the ballot box and requires supporting infrastructures, such as a strong business community and even the correct mindset. The latter is intertwined with theology; for instance, a religious approach that focuses on the punitive dimensions of religion is hostile to a democratic society.

Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad (Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS)) distinguished between the fixed (*thawabit*) and changeable (*mutaghayyarat*) components of Islam and

endorsed democracy on the grounds that forms of government belong to the latter. But contrary to widespread assumptions, this approval has nothing to do with necessity (*darurah*), for in cases of necessity, the Shariah permits appropriation only to the extent necessary for survival. Yet in democratic societies individuals have gone beyond mere survival to flourish and thrive with their own talents and capabilities.

Dr Farouk Musa (IRF) linked democracy with freedom, rationality and social justice, in the tradition of Muhammad Asad, Ali Shariati and Rachid Ghannouchi. If man has been dignified by Allah (Qur'an, 17:70), it is because of the gift of reason, by means of which also man affirms *al-tawhid* (Oneness and Unity of Allah). At the social level, *al-tawhid* is the underlying principle of human fraternity enjoined in Islam, hence its antipathy to sectarianism, such as racism.

International Seminar on Islam without Sectarianism (10 March 2013, The Renaissance Hotel, Kuala Lumpur)

Michael K. Scott, IAIS Malaysia

“Islam without sectarianism,” a seminar held in Kuala Lumpur on 10 March 2013, provided a forum for a number of scholars to speak out against the rising scourge of sectarianism throughout the world. This was a bold collective attempt by leading scholars and activists in Southeast Asia to tackle one of the most sensitive issues that have plagued relations among Muslims in recent years, organised by the Malaysian Islamic Renaissance Front, IAIS Malaysia and the Kuala Lumpur-based Islamic Book Trust.

Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali, founding chairman and CEO of IAIS Malaysia and the first presenter at the seminar, reviewed the history of sectarian developments in Islam and some of the relevant dicta of the Quran and the Hadith. He underlined the spirit of tolerance that historically governed relations between the various schools of Islamic Law and the atmosphere of mutual respect that accompanied the early rise of schools of thought in Islam. Despite the polarisation underway today, most authoritative Muslim scholars continue to call for *taqrib*, or the rapprochement of the *madhahib*, most notably between Shi'as and Sunnis, by urging an end to condemnatory rhetoric between them.

“The Amman Message was a strongly worded fatwa coming from leading Sunni and Shi'a scholars denouncing the idea of charging Muslims of any sect as *kufir* [disbelief],” Professor Kamali stated, referring to the declaration by prominent Muslim scholars and leaders in 2004. Although it would not be practical to abolish the *madhahib*, Muslims, according to Kamali, “should focus