

EDITORIAL

This January 2013 issue of ICR stands as a milestone in the evolution of the journal since its launch, with the birth of IAIS Malaysia, in 2008. It marks five years of continuous quarterly publication; with it we signal a number of changes that we believe will serve the journal's aims and readership well, refining the former and expanding the latter. They offer scope for more cogent analysis from increasingly diverse points of view within the Muslim *ummah* and globally, from within circles of interfaith dialogue and civilisational exchange.

We commence our sixth year of publication with a new advisory board and the appointment of four regional editors to enhance global coverage and representation. The present issue ushers in new associate editors as well as a new "Focus" segment on the interplay of crisis and opportunity in our world, drawing upon unique sources from within the Muslim world for understanding current and unfolding developments.

In this issue we publish an insider view of the strife afflicting the Muslim community in Myanmar; we take stock of the impasse reached by the US and NATO in Afghanistan and present the grounds for pursuing negotiations with the Taliban; in neighbouring Pakistan we examine the "fragmented" educational mosaic in the country, a situation that poses a major challenge for the government; and from Bangladesh we reflect on the direction and impact of continuing Islamisation.

In our regular "Articles" section Professor Anthony Johns sets the tone with an in-depth discussion of Islam's thinker and luminary al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and his central role in Islamic humanism, followed by a glimpse into how al-Ghazali came to be so relevant to the Malay context through an article by Dr Megawati Moris. While al-Ghazali has been deeply revered in most of the Muslim world, he also had his detractors, notably in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The recent history of Saudi Arabia itself is the subject, in our third article, of scholarly historical assessment by Professor Sean Foley, a colleague in the USA who adroitly addresses the current interplay of Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union and modern Islam. This in turn sets the stage for informed consideration of the mix of globalisation, economic and financial crises by expert colleagues in Malaysia who discuss the Islamic financial audit system, the case against interest-based finance (*riba*), and the ethics of stem-cell research.

Policy recommendations stemming from our Articles section are substantial and range from conducting consultations with prominent figures and Ulama associations in Malaysia and other Muslim countries to a proposal to raise public and institutional awareness concerning the destabilising effects of interest-based financing and the linkage between it and cyclical market instability.

The scope and vitality of other policy recommendations emerging from this issue of ICR are varied and relevant to cite:

- World leaders should anticipate the renewal of ties between Saudi Arabia, Russia and the former Soviet states, in view of the substantial cultural, historical and religious linkages that bind their peoples; they should allocate resources to promote exchanges in these areas.
- Interest-based financing should be phased out and replaced with financing on the basis of profit and loss sharing.
- The Central Bank of Malaysia should chart the process and method of *Shariah* audit, providing the benchmarks and standards required for an Internal *Shariah* Audit Framework, instead of leaving it to the industry.
- A comprehensive Talent Development Programme should be designed for internal *Shariah* auditors, reviewers and advisors for skill training, cross fertilisation of ideas and continuous education.
- Universities in the region and in Malaysia in particular must formulate their own worldviews instead of following those of former colonial masters, and provide an enabling environment for youth and students to debate and speak freely.

The issues and themes simmering in our Articles department surface for further consideration in our Viewpoints section, which features discussions of finance and ethics, civilisational renewal in Iraq, early childhood education, and finally the rule of law in Islam in conjunction with contemporary human rights discourse. The January 2013 issue of ICR closes with notes of recent events and activities that have engaged the attention and resources of IAIS Malaysia and its staff, partners and affiliates.

This issue goes to press with the arrival of two new associate editors at ICR: a long-time veteran of Malaysia studies and the Malay context of Islamic civilisational renewal, environmental and political scientist Dr Daud Batchelor (hailing from Brisbane, Australia); and seasoned Muslim world development practitioner, Arabic translator and teacher, Michael K. Scott (hailing from Baltimore, Maryland).

We are confident that this January 2013 issue will effectively engage a wider circle of readers and authors in continuing our efforts to present more refined discussions. We hope you join us for the extended journey.

Mohammad Hashim Kamali
Editor-in-Chief