ISTAC’S SPECIAL LECTURE FOR HALF OF YEARS 2011

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In the last issue of the ISTAC Bulletin, I was interviewed by Mr. Rosli Ali regarding my translation of the Mathnawi. The interview gave me the opportunity to talk about my decision to translate this work and how I went about doing it. However, it was conducted before I had edited the manuscript which I subsequently did five times. Even so, the interview served an unexpected purpose: it was cathartic and provided an outlet for me to talk about a work which was largely completed quietly, with little assistance, and without ceremony. The interview allowed me to describe the long hours that I spent working on the Mathnawi, and how the experience itself was exhilarating, liberating and satisfying. Mr. Rosli’s interview also gave me a certain degree of exposure which brought about well-wishes from some colleagues. I guess the need to be appreciated is human, and to that end, this interview provided that satisfaction.

Translating a work as huge as the Mathnawi requires long term commitment. Rumi’s Mathnawi is a six-volume work with more than half a million words in it. Though I took less than ten months to translate it, the short period of time is the result of commitment. A man who commits himself to such an endeavor must surely have to be one who finds solace and happiness in spending time with books, papers and pens, though he may appear to some to be one who must lead an uneventful, sad, lonely and, maybe even, a troubled life. How could reading and writing for long stretches of time be “elating, liberating, and satisfying”? I guess the easy answer to this is, “The same way that running around in a court to put a ball through a hoop or kicking a ball into the back of a net is for some.” If satisfaction derived or loneliness experienced is proportional to the length of a work, then I must be counted amongst the most satisfied or the loneliest on the planet. Many may think that for the want of something better, such a man is where he is because he is a little choice and has to accept that which has been relegated to him by sad fate.

To those who know, the one who has experienced the joy of learning through books, through reading and writing, will find few engagements in life that can bring similar pleasure. Writing and reading is the occupation of true lovers of knowledge: the disseminators and the collectors of truth. I have to qualify the word lovers with “true” here because there are those who are involved in activities that incidentally or accidentally resemble those. A facsimile is after all only a representation of the real thing. For the lover of knowledge, the labor of his love is the balm of his being, for those who are involved for lesser reasons than this derive little pleasure from it.
Dean’s Message

It is my pleasure to see another issue of ISTAC bulletin out. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) stands for academic excellence in higher education. It offers M.A. and Ph.D. degrees and holds regular seminars, symposiums, workshops on various topics addressing contemporary issues.

In its ongoing drive to address challenges to Islamic thought and civilization, ISTAC has articulated several works that analyzed and criticized the philosophical bedrock of modernism, namely secularism, that marginalizes religion to, at best, the personal domain, and never allows it to have any role whatsoever in the public domain. Proponents of modernism have even advertised such slogans as "religion is the opium of the people" and "God is dead" to feverishly argue that religiosity would ultimately vanish in a process of enlightenment. Solid academic works were undertaken by a group of ISTAC and IIUM staff as well as many other academicians that illustrated the falsity of this prophecy, and demonstrated that spirituality had and will continue to motivate and galvanize massive number of peoples worldwide. Suffice to mention in this respect the masterpiece and magnum opus of ISTAC’s founding director Tan Sri Professor Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, namely "Islam and Secularism."

Within this calculated drive, ISTAC had just (18-20 October, 2011) organized a conference to engage with the so-called Postmodernist movement that is largely a western reaction to the assumption of the modernists of the certainty of the scientific effort to explain reality. In other words, Postmodernism rejects the philosophical basis of modernism, namely objectivity and progress. Nonetheless, it is difficult to give a concrete definition of this movement, as such an attempt violates the postmodernists' own premise that no definite terms, boundaries or absolute truth exist. It thus remains elusive and vague, since those who claim to be postmodernists have varying beliefs and opinions on a variety of issues.

Thus, the primary objective of this scholarly gathering, which I must quickly add, is the first of its kind in the country, is to explore the philosophical fundamentals of Postmodernism, and its position towards some paramount issues, particularly the role of religion and spirituality in this tightly-wired global village. The other major concern of this conference is to develop and articulate an Islamic response or responses to the stand of the postmodernists towards those issues. By the end of the day, we seek through this function, and probably other future engagements, to engage in a constructive debate with the postmodernists. It is our hope that we will be able to persuade them to accept, or at least to understand, the Islamic proposed exit from the current stubborn problems and dangers that threatens the very existence of this interdependent world. The essence of this proposed solution has been beautifully summarized in one Arabic proverb that may be loosely rendered in English as follows: “The essence of religion is humanity and the essence of humanity is ethics and morality.” After all the current economic down turn, which started in the United States but has aggressively and alarmingly mushroomed throughout the globe, is not due to lack of "professionalism" so to speak, but is exclusively because of massive selfishness, corruption, fraud and deceit within the business industry. Hence, if the world is to overcome this calamity, the business community should learn and practice moral uprightness. It is spirituality, and spirituality alone, that can equip bankers and businessmen with this essential and much needed value system.
The translation of the Mathnawi, though academic in nature, was far from just an exercise in rendering a poem into a different language. Rumi's poem is a rumination of the spiritual. Reading it provides intellectual ecstasy. In my case, translating it offered a means to express that feeling in black and white.

Contrary to the assumption made by some, neither the size of the Mathnawi nor its language intimidated me. In fact, the Diwan of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi is larger and purportedly by some more intense. I am not convinced by the latter claim, at least, not from reading the available translations of portions of this work or the criticisms of scholars who praise the whole of the Mathnawi, but parts of the Diwan. Nicholson, the brilliant translator of the Mathnawi into English, himself felt that it presented the range of Rumi's genius. The Diwan sparks the mind occasionally; the Mathnawi flames the heart always.

The Mathnawi itself and the translating of it taught me many things, amongst them, that good deeds are always rewarded by God, but sometimes punished by men; that the failure of a man may find sympathy and refuge in God, but bring joy and pleasure in others. Having said this, I must say that I am happy that I was able to do this work at ISTAC. For those who have not worked at ISTAC or stayed here long may not be aware of the unique environment that the place provides for scholars. The support staff plays an important role in accommodating the needs of professors here. I have worked in many places, but what ISTAC has developed is unique. I am not quite sure if the support staff themselves or the professors who have never worked outside of ISTAC realize this. Here it is not just about work. We have developed a camaraderie that facilitates good and frank exchange, and some of us who have a close enough relationship with our drivers and technicians hug when we meet and go out for tea or meet up during weekends. They help us out when we have problems and we reciprocate. We know their children and about their successes and woes. It is in this environment that I translated the Mathnawi. Some staff, more than others and more than they realize, helped the process along by just enquiring about the work on a regular basis. I saw this as encouragement. In their own way, they showed excitement for what I was doing, and I was happy to share with them the progress of my work. When the mock copy of the books came out, they came to the office elated, genuinely happy and full of congratulatory praises. We at ISTAC are pleased to have such an administrative team.

Some students, who were exposed to the work in my Selected Islamic Literature in Translation class last semester, requested that on top of the listed items to be covered in the syllabus, we concentrate on the Mathnawi. This has continued into this semester.

The Mathnawi is supposed to be launched sometime in July by the Prime Minister at Istana Budaya. ITNM is in charge of all the arrangements for this. In the meanwhile I have yet to “hear” the call from the cosmos to work on a large project. When it summons, I shall be on my way.

"We have developed a camaraderie that facilitates good and frank exchange, and some of us who have a close enough relationship with our drivers and technicians hug when we meet and go out for tea or meet up during weekends."

The Recognition of Al-Shajarah

By Prof. Cemil Akgogan

ISI Thompson has recently decided to include Al-Shajarah in its "Arts and Humanities Citation Index." Al-Shajarah, the academic journal of ISTAC, is being published since 1996. The aim of the journal was defined as "introducing to Malaysia and the rest of the world the academic insight of Islamic scholarship." In the initial stages of the journal, many of the papers focused on the reconstruction of scholarly perspectives towards particular subjects, such as history, natural science and psychology. Headed by the founder of the institution and the journal itself, Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, the journal was created as a medium for manifesting the learning and understanding of the scholars and students to the outside world.

However al-Shajarah suffered due to administrative changes, but since 2008 it began to pick up under the editorship of Professor Cemil Akgogan. By the end of 2009 al-Shajarah again not only became regular in publication, a special issue of the journal was published on "The Mystical Aspects of Islamic Art and Architecture" at the end of 2010. With the assistance of the special issue editor, Prof. Amit Zerkos, and the copy editor, Prof. Sayyid Ajmal Al-Aidrus the journal has been able to make an impact on the academic community. Following the indexing by ISI Thompson Prof. Akgogan said in a statement, "We have been able to achieve this important recognition bestowed on us by ISI Thompson with the help and hard work of Prof. Dr. Sayyid Ajmal Al-Aidrus."

Other than books ISTAC library has over 26,084 bound journals and 2,554 manuscripts in book form including Al-Shajarah."
A Mystical Art Symposium

By Professor Amir H. Zekzego

The second symposium on mystical art in Islam was held at ISTAC from July 20-23, 2010. Earlier the first international symposium was held also at ISTAC on March 23-27, 2009. Both symposiums were well received and enriched the cross cultural initiative that IJUM seeks to pioneer. Excellent papers were presented by scholars from different parts of the world, namely, Algeria, Bangladesh, Bosnia, India, Iran, Malaysia, New Zealand, Sudan, USA, and Uzbekistan.

The richness of each of these cultures manifests themselves best in the kinds of ‘art’ they produce. Art, in the broad sense, includes a wide range of creative activities that comprise visual and performing arts, music and literature. It is a platform on which the spirit of society is showcased. Behind the diverse artistic manifestations of most traditional societies, one may find a common language—a language that has its roots in faith and devotion. This language, in the words of sages and mystics, is referred to as the ‘language of the heart’ or the ‘tongue of the soul’.

It was with the thirst of spiritual rejuvenation that the seed of the two events were sown. The symposiums aimed to provide insight and exposure to the rich and colorful artistic traditions of different Muslim nations the world over, and to explore the domain of mystical literature and its role in the promotion of esoteric knowledge and spiritual lifestyle.

The second one, however, saw the meeting of many minds and a considerable effort at planning and execution. Many of the articles approached aspects of art through the Sufi tradition of traditional Islamic piety. Some papers include discussions on the doctrines of Ibn Arabi and the concept of ‘apparent non-existence’ whereas others took a more symbolic approach by deriving hidden meanings in the cultural representation of birds, such as in Malay civilization. All together the diverse presentations offered a variety of differing perspectives in the elucidation of the mystical aspects of art throughout time, educating and enlightening the numerous guests who attended.

ISTAC Second International Conference on Islamic Science & the Contemporary World

By Anasallah Ali

Some two years ago ISTAC organized the First International Conference on Islamic Science & the Contemporary World with the theme: Science in Contemporary Education. More than 150 participants and twenty-five presenters took part in that conference. One major resolution of this conference was that ISTAC would hold a second conference of a similar nature with yet a new theme to focus on Islamic Science and Tertiary Education. This theme is considered of great importance in the light of present recognition amongst Muslim and Western scholars that Islamic Science should be added to the curriculum of Muslim universities globally.

The conference was held between June 29 and the 30th of 2010. Many guests attended, taking part in the lectures and offering their own comments and questions after the main presentations. Some of the objectives of the second conference were, for instance, to discern the significance of Islamic philosophy of science, thought, and education for the contemporary world. Other more idealistic objectives were to set the foundations for Malaysia becoming the leading centre for Islamic Science in the world. Underlying these objectives, several presenters offered comprehensive analyses on the Malay educational system and intellectuality in general, offering current problems and possible solutions in understanding the importance of Islamic Science and incorporating it into the general framework of society. For instance, Emeritus Prof. Datuk Dr. Osman Bakar presented his paper on the influence and necessity for Islamic Epistemology to be understood and adopted in the education system in Malaysia. Prof. Cemil Akdogan attempted to reconcile current perspectives in Western Science with the Islamic outlook with his paper, "Islam and Quantum Mechanics", emphasizing the similarities between Islamic thought and current trends in the physical understanding of the Universe. Whereas, Dr. Ibrahim Shogar focused more on the Qur’anic approach to science as opposed to the more secular and materialistic approach of the West, advocating the former as far more beneficial and holistic in the understanding of reality.

Conclusively, the conference was enlightening for all the guests who participated, but whether it had a more influential impact (its objectives being accomplished) has yet to be seen. Perhaps future conferences and public interests will inform us of the results in the near future.

Tan Sri Professor Kamal Hassan Joins ISTAC

Tan Sri Prof. Dr. M. Kamal Hassan has joined ISTAC on February 1, 2011. An expert on contemporary Islamic Thought, Professor Kamal Hassan has been promoted to the position of newly established position of Professor Ulung by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tan Sri Prof. Dr. M. Kamal Hassan has a rich teaching and academic administrative background. He has served and taught at University of Malaya (UM), National University of Malaysia (UKM), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA. He has also produced many books and monographs. He serves as a member of editorial boards of a number of reputed national and international journals. ISTAC community is delighted to have him as a regular staff and his presence is expected to boost ISTAC’s aspiration to become a center of excellence in education in Malaysia.

Photo above is the illustration hunting for organizing the Second International Conference on Islamic Science and the Contemporary World on 29th to 30th June 2010.
Arab Spring or an Idealistc Dream?
A Cursory Look at Uprisings in the Arab World

By Abdullah Al-Ahsan

Civil disobedience in the form of street demonstrations in a large part of the Arab world has been making continuous headlines all over the world. While some observers are viewing the recent development as "Arab Spring" and birth of a "collective Arab consciousness" many western and Israeli observers are viewing these developments as an Islamist threat to international order. It all began with a fraught suicide attempt of Mohamed Bouazizi, a frustrated Tunisian who became street vendor without a proper license. Bouazizi was not only prevented from selling his goods; he was slapped by the female law enforcing officer. He went to govern's office to complain about the treatment he had received from the officer, but nobody paid attention to him. An insulted and humiliated Bouazizi set himself on fire. According to official reports he passed away on January 4 which ignited the whole of Tunisia. The flame rapidly engulfed most of the Arab World and Iran within days. Are these uprisings just coincidences or these are natural consequences of decades of misrule and disregard for human dignity? Have these events suddenly become conscious of their human and democratic rights? Are the demonstrators motivated by Western type of democracy as claimed by the mainstream media? Or the Qur'anic teaching on human dignity has played any role in these uprisings? Why are these uprisings happening now? What will be the possible consequences of these uprisings? Although a comprehensive analysis of these questions is outside the scope of this short piece, we shall make some general observations on the issue.

The nature of these demonstrations varies from one country to another. Although Arab nationalists once dream of one single nation, the reality is that they are divided into 22 sovereign nations. Borders of most of these nations were drawn in Paris following WWI by some western orientalist experts and politicians, not by the people in the region. This was followed by installment of monarchs and governments by European powers in many of those countries. One common characteristic of these demonstrations is the participation of the youth who seemed to have been frustrated with the methods of governance in their countries. And most of these countries have been ruled by despotic rulers for decades. Are these youth motivated by western democratic method of governance? Yes, perhaps they are. But they are also aware of weaknesses of democratic method evidenced in the USA and India – two prominent models of modern democracy – where lobby groups and cost system triumph. Denial of the right of the people in Palestine and Kashmir is a barrier to a positive perception of democracy. They are also aware of the fact that most of the despotic rulers claimed to have been democratically elected and were supported by western powers.

Are the youth motivated by Islamic teachings on justice and equality? Again, perhaps they are. But the question is much more complex than the question about western democracy mainly because of two reasons. One, most of these countries during the past century under the impact of European ideas subscribed to ideas of modernization. As a result, the state power increased to an extent that is absolutely unparalleled in history. And the second reason is that Muslims have not gone through an experience of Qur'anic criticism like the one that Europe has gone through in the form of Bible criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries. In fact most questions raised about the validity of the Bible as a source of knowledge do not apply to the Qur'an. Therefore the Qur'an is a living force in Muslim societies. All Muslim reformers in history – fundamentalist and modernist alike – have appealed Muslims to return to Qur'anic values. One may witness the use of Islamist ideas in chants of the demonstrators. One would also witness the same in the process of seeking legitimacy by rulers. Hosni Mubarak received support during the early days of uprising from a number of religious figures. Earlier Saddam Hussein had incorporated Arabic inscription "God is great" in the Iraqi flag; Saddam ruler espoused the title "servant of the two holy shrines" in the 1980s. One may also note the role of Fridays in these current demonstrations. The challenge for Muslims, however, is the determination of a methodology to distinguish between religiosity and pseudo-religiosity.

The French ambassador to Istanbul before the 1789 Revolution in France is reported to have written to his king that, "Here it is not like it is in France where the king is sole master and does as he pleases. Here the Sultan has to consult." This indicates the role of Qur'anic ideas in Muslim societies in history. In contemporary Muslims societies Qur'anic values for good governance such as khilafah, amanah, adlalah, and shura, which correspond well with western values such as stewardship, trust, justice, freedom of expression, accountability and transparency have been pushed back. The current uprisings are one of the consequences of this laxity.

Now the question is: what would be the future of this development? Most observers of international affairs have expressed concerns about the immediate future in these countries. In fact the situation might become much more catastrophic if considerate and thoughtful steps are not taken to address the situation. Who these countries follow chaos and lawlessness like that of Somalia? Or these countries will fall victim of invasion by outside forces such as Afghanistan and Iraq? Will the UN declaration of no-fly zone over Libya end up with another occupation? The US, already exhausted because of such interventions, was earlier reported to have asked Saudi Arabia to ship arms to anti-government forces in Libya. However reports of popular uprisings are also coming out of Saudi Arabia and the administration has already banned demonstrations in that country. The situation in Bahrain, where Saudi troops are reported to have intervened, is even more potent a threat much greater than Libya and Yemen because of historical the Shi'a – Sunni variation within the ummah. All these are matters of concern not only for people in the region, but for everybody who is interested in international peace and security.

In an interview on the issue the British born orientalist Bernard Lewis said to Wall Street Journal (April 2) that Muslims should be "allowed -- and indeed helped and encouraged -- to develop their own ways of doing things." This is a very prudent recommendation. Muslim civilization is definitely capable of doing this. But will Muslims be able to encounter schemes of political power struggle that is going on in various countries? Lewis has suggested not to hold elections in these countries immediately because elections should be the "culmination -- not the beginning -- of a gradual political process." But here the story is as many western journalists would like to tell him -- seems to be ignoring history of the region. Egypt has witnessed a vibrant democratic rule between 1924 and 1952 which was frequently interrupted by the palace and the British. Tunisia has a rich history of constitutional development in the country. Also who would guarantee against possible schemes by the elements of the old regime in these countries? Therefore one needs to be careful when offering help and encouragement to the region. In order to help and assist these events, Ben Ali during his last days of presidency France wanted to send troops but Ben Ali was not able to hold long enough. Also if Turkey had not intervened perhaps France would have taken NATO to a different direction in Libya. Also it has been reported that, "Frank Wisner, President Barack Obama's envoy to Cairo who infuriated the White House this weekend by urging Hosni Mubarak to remain President of Egypt, works for a New York and Washington law firm which works for the dictator's Egyptian communist kin" (The Independent, February 7, 2011). Such "help and encouragement" only fuels to the fire of the clash of civilizations thesis. Incidentally this thesis was also initially conceived by Bernard Lewis.

In this connection one should also note that these uprisings demand an examination of the role of "think-tanks" engaged in research on the region. Many observers have already raised questions as to why think-tanks have failed to predict these uprisings. Answer to this question lies on the aim and objectives of these institutions. Do think-tanks seek for the truth or they seek to promote an agenda of keeping control of the region? Clearly there are mercenaries working for interest groups in the guise of think-tanks. Even a very casual gaze at the activities of Brussels based International Crisis Group and Washington based MEMRI would indicate that they have specific agenda to advance.

"Arab Spring" demands wisdom and concerted action. People in the region will need help and encouragement from others outside the region, but this has to be done on the basis of common human and civilizational values such as dignity, equality and justice. This is essential for building trust.

Hiding information in the guise of national security would constitute a breach of trust. Institutions and organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Transparency International are doing a remarkable job, and in our opinion, they engaged in research and encouraged to play a more constructive role on issues of governance.
The Framework of Muhammad Hamidullah’s Epistemology

By Asadullah Ali

The late French/Indian scholar, Muhammad Hamidullah, was an expert on hadith and Islamic history. His contribution to Islamic scholarship cannot be underestimated. His theory of knowledge, however, is difficult to extract from his main works given that he never directly elucidated them. The following excerpt from the article, “The Epistemology of Muhammad Hamidullah: A Curious Analysis”, illustrates:

Source & Structure of Knowledge

Dr. Hamidullah believes that the method by which reality is understood is ultimately found in Allah (swt), but through separate mediums or tools of understanding. He categorizes the following ways in which knowledge is communicated between man and God, seeming to qualify them based on the effectiveness of their transmission. From here we can extract the structure of his general theory of knowledge:

(1) Dreams
(2) Intuition
(3) Teaching
(4) Inspiration
(5) Revelation

Interestingly he places dreams as the least effective, considering them the “feeblest” of the rest (par. 139). He leaves us no real evidence to suggest anything concrete about why they are so feeble. He can only argue he believes this because dreams are merely analogues or signs (ayat) of the signs present in the world around us, meaning that a dream is merely an abstraction of what is abstracted from the physical realm; images of images. To be fair, he suggests they are feeble only in the sense of receiving guidance from God, not in the overall scheme of knowledge.

The second way one gains knowledge is through the ila of intuition, “a kind of auto-suggestions” one can obtain a “presentation of solutions in case of impasses or insoluble or difficult problems” (par. 140). We can only argue that he believes intuition is part of what I have come to call Hamidullah’s concept of the “faculties” (par. 137), or the attributes of the thrall. It is suggestive in his writings (and seems consistent) to assume that reason is also a faculty closely tied to intuition & moral conscience, and is one of the means by which we come to interpret the knowledge given to us: “it is the Grace of God which enables our reason to distinguish between that which is celestial and worthy of following, and that which is diabolical and is fit to be shunned” (par. 137). No doubt, parts of the faculties given to us also include our senses, which we use to abstract the physical world in which we live. How our faculties receive information is never expounded on by Dr. Hamidullah in detail and he didn’t seem to give it much concern.
BELIEF IN DIALOGUE CONFERENCE

By Gary Dargan

The Challenges of Teaching Islam at American Universities: Prof. Dr. Jeff T. Kenney 19/01/2011

Prof. Kenny explained his experience and difficulties regarding educating Americans about Islam in the university. He explained that many of the problems have to do primarily with the disinterest of the local community due to their preconceived notions imbued by the media, which often gives a negative perception of the religion to the masses. This problem also extends to university administration in that their biases do not allow a serious consideration of the necessity of education of Islam in the American universities.

Even when students decide to take courses on Islam it is confusing for them because they already perceive the religion as being opposed to their own civilization. Therefore, much of education about Islam in America has many obstacles in relieving misconceptions while simultaneously providing an objective view that alienates itself from the demonization of Muslims and Islam in western media today.

Many questions were asked by the audience to the effect of what can be done to overcome these obstacles as well as concerns regarding the relationship between the media and educational institutions. Many of the problems were recognized in this distant relationship and the divorce of the media culture and academic standards today in America.

Gary Dargan, a PhD student at ISTAC attended this conference held at the American University of Sharjah from 21-23 June 2011. The conference was organized by the university in conjunction with the International Society for Science and Religion and the British Council. The title theme of the conference was "Science and Religion: Two cultures?" Many of the leading authorities on the relationship between religion and science attended including John Brooke, Paul Davies, Rupert Grinterdoni, Mehdi Golshani, Nidhal Guessoum and Zauiden Sardar.

The conference was divided into two parallel sessions, one looking at the two issues of faith and the other dealing with social and ethical issues. A variety of papers covered issues of potential conflict between science and religion and areas of overlap between the two. Gary presented a paper on the relation between evolution and Islamic metaphysics. This was well received with some useful comments from two of the delegates.

Several papers focused on ethical issues raised by modern science and technology and the role of religion, culture and science in social and community matters. A parallel student seminar was also conducted with students participating in extended sessions with selected delegates and attending the plenary session. A listing of the presentations can be found here: http://www.aus.edu/conferences/BIDAUS2011/documents/BIDAUS2011_Programme_Overture.pdf

The opening address was given by Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Professor Ihsanoglu began with a reminder that the first revealed word of the Qur’an was "hqra", (read) and that the most common injunction was to think, reflect or contemplate. He then outlined some of the historical achievements of Muslim scientists and their contribution to the European Renaissance before discussing the reasons for the decline of science in the Muslim world. His main point was that a sense of cultural superiority among Muslims resulted in a disconnection with developments in Europe. This resulted in a lack of transfer of knowledge until it was evaluated within Islam’s own tradition. The full text of his address can be accessed at http://www.isira.com/pages/21_June_2011_99.php.

The conference included a panel discussion which was broadcast by the BBC World Service. Views expressed by the panel ranged from the conflict between religion and science was perceived rather than real to there is a religious feeling that the universe has a purpose and science is the best way to find it. There was a general view that where conflict appears then be as sure as you can of the science before trying to reach religious understanding. The consensus was that the Qur’an pushes people to explore nature to seek understanding of the world. Not through religion or authority but through science. The panel saw the obstacles to rejuvenating science in the Muslim world as a complex mixture of authoritarian regimes, and restriction of freedom of expression and thought. There was a view that Islam had gone from an agent encouraging debate and free enquiry to a religion used to restrict. The panel expressed a need to rebuild a scientific culture starting at the junior school level and working up. They pointed to a need to develop a culture where junior scholars were free to question and develop skills for collaborative research with their professors.

RECENT ACTIVITIES AT ISTAC

Special Lecture by Distinguished Visiting Professor Dr. William A. Graham 24/06/2011

Lecture by visiting Professor Dr. William A. Graham, John Lord O’Brien Professor of Divinity and Murray A. Alberson Professor of Middle Eastern Studies Harvard Divinity School, on the subject of "Islam, The West and the Myth of Clash of Civilizations". The attendees to this lecture were high and the distinguished professor gave an interesting and compelling lecture on the historical realities surrounding Islam and Muslim perspectives on civilization and politics. The myth of the "Clash of Civilizations" was easily dismantled, though a very engaging question and answer session between the attendees and the Professor revealed more interesting facts and facets about our religion and its relation to history and current global events.

Some of the questions posed were regarding how Shari’ah can be implemented in Muslim societies through democratic processes without drawing concerns from those who actually support the thesis of the "Clash". What can be done to show that the difference in governance does not necessarily equal to being a different civilization? How do we emphasize the similarities while also understanding the differences in ideas and culture that do not lead to a complete marginalization of one or the other? These and many more questions were given ample time to answer, though much more must be done to offer solutions to these problems.

Visiting Professor Dr. William A. Graham with ISTAC’S Deputy Dean Prof. Abdullah Al-Aliyan
The Contemporary Arab Revolt with Special Reference to the Egyptian Situation: Mr. Hussein Mohamad (Former Member of Parliament of Egypt) 06/06/2011

Former member of the Egyptian parliament, Mr. Hussein Mohamad gave insight into the political and cultural structure of Egypt that has influenced the recent revolution that occurred in Egypt. He also noted how Egypt plays a central role in the Arab world and how revolution there impacts the region the most. Much of the discussion focused on the motivations and factors leading up to the revolt, primarily revolting around economic and human rights concerns regarding participation in government and certain regimes exploitation by foreign powers. The influence of Islam and its evolution through the prior Islamic modernists movement was also noted (originally conceptualized by Sh. Muhammad Abd). The latter part of the presentation articulated the future possibilities of the Egyptian revolution on the country and the region as a whole.

Many questions were concerned with how the people will be able to create a democratic society that would be able to sustain itself over past regimes while simultaneously not becoming subject to outside forces willing to exploit the political instability in the region (extremists groups and certain western countries). It was agreed upon that the future of Egypt will ultimately determine the future of the region regarding the success or failure of these revolutions.

ABOVE:
Yhg. Dato' Ab. Rahim Md Noor, Director General of the Ministry of Higher Education recently visited Istituc, IUM Rector, Prof. Dato' Seri Dr. Zaleha Khairuddin and other top IUM officials were engaged in close discussions with the honorable guest.