

**The Politics of Islamic Identity in Southeast Asia.** By Syed Serajul Islam. Singapore: Thomson, 2005, pp. 204. ISBN 981-254-532-8.

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In recent decades the world has witnessed a surge of various types of religious revivalism and awareness, some of which, in varying degrees, are violent and fundamentalists in nature and character. Since discovery of oil in the Middle East, Islamic movement has gained increasing strength in various parts of the world during the past four decades. The Jewish/Zionist movement which has a long history emerged in its present form especially since the end of World War II. In the post-modern period even the Christian movement, for example, the Evangelical Christian/Bible Christian movement in North America is becoming increasingly assertive and influential. With the emergence of Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), Hindu revivalism has become a major force in South Asian/Indian Politics during the past two decades. All these movements are highly political in nature and approach. Some of them have considerable implications and ramifications for national, regional, and global politics or international relations.

As a result of all these developments and changes, a good number of political scientists have increasingly looked at multidimensional aspects of these religious movements which have enormous political impact that has radically changed the dynamics of political games and strategies in various parts of the world. One such scholar is Dr. Syed Serajul Islam, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science at Lakehead University in Canada. He has written an interesting, informative and well-researched book on this relatively recent and topical issue. This book is a lucid, analytical examination of the politics of Islamic identity in Southeast Asia and its long term implications.

Readers will find the organization and structure of the book useful and practical. The author begins his analysis with an overview of theoretical perspectives. This is followed by an insightful introductory discussion of Islam and the Muslim society in Southeast Asia. Against

this background, he carefully examines various dimensions of the politics of Islamic identity in Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), and Malaysia. Finally, in the concluding part of the book he presents a comparative analysis of all these movements, as well as thoughtful recommendations for conflict resolutions in these countries. These recommendations provide both policy makers and students of public policy with food for serious thoughts and reflection.

The quality of this study has increased considerably because of the fact that the author has discussed these movements from both historical and contemporary perspectives and experiences. Discussions of both the history and contemporary situations make adequate understanding of politics of Islamic identity relatively easier for readers who are not intimately familiar with Southeast Asian politics in both regional and global context.

The author has discussed adequately the history, dynamics, and management of these movements, as well as pertinent events. He has also appended some useful and relevant primary sources (documents) at the end of the book, and provided the readers with a comprehensive bibliography that will be useful and handy for those who want to further pursue their interest in the politics of separatism in general, and in Muslim politics in southeast Asia in particular.

A wide variety of books on various aspects of Southeast Asian politics, society, and economics are available; however, relatively speaking, there is a scarcity of thorough and adequate study of the background of the politics of Islamic identity in the countries where Muslims are the minority. This book fills this gap. Muslims are in the majority in Indonesia and Malaysia, but they are the minority in Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma). Hence, the book provides two interesting dimensions: politics of Islamic identity in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority countries and discusses their positions in the society.

The author has demonstrated considerable command of the subject by encompassing a wide range of materials in 204 pages. Altogether, this is an excellent study of the dynamics and intricacies of politics of Islamic identity and strategies in Southeast Asia. It should be a required reading for all students of Southeast Asian politics.