

While reading the book I could not help comparing Izetbegovic with Jinnah and Iqbal, two Asian Muslim leaders of the 20th century. Like Iqbal, Izetbegovic was a philosopher, a man with a vision. He thought that the Muslims could provide a leadership that would help solve the problems of the region by creating a state based on the Islamic principles of justice and fairness. But Izetbegovic was also a practical man, like Jinnah. Hinnal, again a lawyer, wanted to realise the dream of Iqbal by creating a new state for Indian Muslims when all avenues of justice within a unified India were denied to them. He was left with little choice but to accept, what he called, “a moth-eaten and truncated” Pakistan. Of course, Bosnia is very different from Pakistan; the comparison cannot be carried too far.

Inescapable Questions is well written, documented with verbatim quotations from the speeches and writing of the author. It is a major document of our time, and one must accord compliments to the late author for leaving such an important document for Muslims in the age of conflict.

Parliaments and Political Change in Asia. By Jürgen Rüländ, Clemens Jürgenmeyer, Michael H. Nelson and Patrick Ziegenhain. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 2005, pp. 323. ISBN 981-230-273-5.

Reviewer: Sadayan Riazurrahman, US Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Despite its over-ambitious title, Jürgen Rüländ et al., should be acclaimed for providing the researched information pertaining to the parliaments of Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, the Philippines and India. The legislatures of these countries have been understudied and the few that exist show no linkage between parliamentary performance and the system of government. The main objective of this study is to examine the contribution of legislatures to the consolidation of new democracies and the stability of older democracies in Asia. The data for this study comes from interviews, press analysis, secondary sources and literature review. The study, however, does not provide a time frame and hence the data collected

at one point in time may not be directly comparable with data at other times.

The authors provide a brief but useful historical background to the inception of the parliamentary institution in the five countries. They argue, contrary to the conventional wisdom, that legislatures have played a prominent role in the process of bringing down authoritarian regimes. They argue that the transition period between the fall of the authoritarian regime and democracy has been facilitated by the parliament. This certainly is not true in all cases and certainly in the case of Thailand, the parliament did not play a role in bringing about regime change. There are many factors like riots, electoral manipulation and perhaps assassination of leading personalities that may act as a catalyst in bringing about regime change.

The authors also pose crucial questions like whether parliaments facilitate or impede democratization and whether it is necessary for parliaments to take part in the creation of a new democratic constitution? They highlight two types of democratic transition: a non-pacted transition and a pacted transition. In a non-pacted transition, parliaments play a marginal or no role in bringing about a new constitution. Usually, the elite or the old order is fully replaced by a new set of reformist leaders. In a pacted transition, the old order agrees to negotiate with the representative of the new reformist order. Pacted transition also underlies the close cooperation between the old order and the new reformists especially if the old guards are still strong and as such only agrees to amendments and concessions. The authors highlight three major patterns of the pacted transition: a major revision of the constitution as in South Korea in 1987; an incremental change over a period of time as in Indonesia between 1999 and 2000; and, the initial piecemeal and selective changes incorporated as part of the legacy of authoritarianism as per event of 1992 up to 1997 in Thailand. However, it is conceivable that the pacted transition could take shape in other than the mentioned three modes.

The book contains valuable insights on the role, position and type of parliamentary set up in the five countries under study. In some countries, such as Indonesia, the parliament is at the third level after the *Majlis Permesyuaratan Rakyat* and the executive. In others, the parliament may be given the sovereign status. Some countries have

bicameral legislatures which the authors believe are good for plural societies. The authors' proposition against unicameralism as lacking in proper check and balance is logically sound.

The book also contains a chapter dealing with parliaments and elections and the factors that weaken a functioning parliament. District delimitation is seen as a fundamental element that weakens the parliament. Other factors which were considered to have a weakening effect on parliaments include such factors like electoral thresholds on who could qualify to vote and take part in an election, and a complicated ballot paper structure that could turn off voter participation in an election. Cleavages between centre and periphery, between state and church (secular-religious cleavage), between city and countryside (urban-rural cleavage), and finally between capital and labour also have a direct effect on the role of parliament. The authors consider cleavages based on ethnicity and those that are based on foreign policy as having an adverse effect on the parliament. They gave scant attention to cleavages based on national ideology.

The authors also provide a useful social profile of parliamentarians and of the institutions. In terms of social profiling of individuals, the authors made it a point to gauge individuals' stance on policies based on their social and ethnic stratification, i.e., occupation, wealth, age, gender and education. They, however, were not blinded by the assumption that parliamentarians' social profile alone would give them a conclusive evidence about their stance on policies. This led them to discuss societies' resource base, political polarization and political culture as among the factors conditioning parliamentarians' actions. The role of parliaments and the parliamentarians is also affected by the Rules of procedure, Parliamentary party groups, Parliamentary committees, and Parliamentary services. It is noteworthy that the authors tried to relate these aspects of the structure to the elective, legislative, representative, and oversight functions performed by parliaments.

The authors have succeeded in proving that there is more to a parliament than its perceived role as a rubber-stamping institution. They also prove, through the five countries studied, that while law making is still class based there is a strong relationship between representative politics and democratic institutions. A more inclusive parliament begets a more open environment for exchange of views

and policies. However, this does not allow the authors to construe that “the longer the history of representative institutions of a country, the greater the chances that democracy as a form of government has taken root in society” (p. 25). Such assertions need to be tested through a comparative study of parliaments and parliamentarians with a larger number of cases.

Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft: The Works and Contributions of Abū Rayān Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī.

By Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman. Kuala Lumpur: The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 2003, pp. 256, ISBN 983-9379-33-X

Reviewer: Muhidin Mulalic, University Tenaga Nasional, Institute of Liberal Studies, Selangor, Malaysia.

The book under review highlights al-Bīrūnī’s (d. 973-1048) methodological study of civilizations and religions which qualifies him to be called the “the Father” of *Religionswissenschaft* (science of religion) worthy of emulation by contemporary scholars. It is ironic that even though the science of religion was initiated by Muslim scholars, they soon lost interest in this field and the lead has been taken over by the Western social scientists. Since the Western scholars exclude religious spirituality and holiness from their study, their methodologies may not be appropriate for the study of religions.

The author elaborates at length that the Qur’ān refutes the transcendent unity of religions but it provides extensive information on diverse religions and emphasises religious tolerance and understanding among diverse religious communities. The Prophet (SAS) accepted and tolerated multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural, and multiracial societies within the Islamic civilization. Thus, the foundation for *Religionswissenschaft* is to be found in the Holy Qur’ān and the prophetic traditions. Relying upon these divine sources, Muslim theologians, historians and geographers, have produced works that represented world civilizations and religions.