

for the discussion of the various methodologies towards the harmonisation of Shari'ah and civil law and left the participants with some fertile thoughts on the subject.

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The Yemeni-Hadramis in Southeast Asia

The Department of History and Civilisation of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, organised an international conference on "The Yemeni-Hadramis in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?" The conference was held at the University's main campus at Gombak and the Crown Princess Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, August 26-28, 2005.

Rationale & the Channels

The Conference was based on the recommendations of a joint meeting held in Mukalla, Yemen, in 2004 between the Dean of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (IIUM) and the top management of the Hadramout University of Science & Technology. The Department of History and Civilization of IIUM was then entrusted to organise the conference with the following objectives:

1. To further academic collaborations between the International Islamic University Malaysia and its counterparts in the Republic of Yemen.
2. To offer an opportunity for scholars across disciplines to engage in a multi-disciplinary forum that will illuminate the distinctive aspects of the Yemeni-Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia.

3. To produce a new paradigm that would contribute to the development of Southeast Asian and Islamic studies, and deepen our understanding of the interactive patterns of the people of diverse cultures, values and beliefs in the region.

This three-day conference explored the case of the Yemeni-Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia through the following channels:

- a. An inaugural speech delivered by Dato' Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.
- b. Keynote addresses by Professor Ulrike Freitag, Director of the Centre of Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin, and Emeritus Professor William R. Roff, University of Edinburgh/Columbia University, New York.
- c. A documentary film on the Architecture of Mud in Yemen.
- d. Thirty-one papers presented on the first two days of the conference by scholars of international repute from fifteen countries.
- e. An Art Exhibition displaying fine artistic works (paintings, calligraphy, and photographs) of a handpicked group of the Yemeni-Hadrami descendants who established their career in Malaysia, and became part of its socio-cultural and creative mosaic scene. The exhibition added a new artistic flavour to the conference, and opened avenues to the conference participants to address the issue of the Yemeni-Hadrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia from a novel perspective that generated further discussions on a variety of debatable issues such as assimilation, integration and identity maintenance.
- f. A Cultural Night held at the Crown Princess Hotel consisting of a series of cultural shows from Malaysia and Hadramout that featured the long lasting and continuous intellectual and cultural interactions between the Hadrami immigrants in Southeast Asia and their roots in Hadarmout.

The Inaugural Speech

The conference was officiated by Dato' Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, on August 26, 2005. In his inaugural speech the Minister highlighted the distinctive features of the Yemeni-Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia, its patterns of

integration and assimilation, and the role played by the Hadrami scholars in shaping Islamic thought in the region. He emphasised that “the process of integration has become complete as physical appearances, language, culture, and mindset have eventually integrated with the local community. The Hadramis were then accepted as part of the community of their new nations.”

This recognition, as the minister argued, “had enabled many of Hadramis to contribute to the growth of the independence movements both in Indonesia and Malaysia.” They fought along with the natives towards the independence of their home countries in Southeast Asia. The minister mentioned contributions of personalities such as Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, Syed Nasir and Syed Jaffar Albar in the struggle for the independence of Malaya through the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). Many Hadrami journalists, writers and teachers were also active in inspiring the spirit of independence in Malay Archipelago. All these activities contributed positively in the assimilation process of the Hadrami community to the local community: “At one point of time, the foreign ministers of Malaysia and Indonesia were of a Hadrami descent. Currently, the Prime Minister of Timor Leste is also a Hadrami.” In Malaysia, the Hadramis are considered *bumiputeras* (son of the soil) and they enjoy special privileges under the Federal Constitution. The Minister also encouraged “the Hadrami descendants to learn more about their heritage, and in return contribute to the enhancement of bilateral relations between the Republic of Yemen and the countries of the region.”

Inaugural Speeches and Conference Papers

The inaugural speech was followed by two keynote papers. delivered. The first paper by Professor Ulrike Freitag dealt with “the Longevity of the Hadrami Diaspora in the Indian Ocean,” highlighting the major factors that marked the success of the Hadramis in Southeast Asia, and examining the role of the Hadrami elite in the Islamization of the region and documentation of this process.

The second paper by Professor William R. Roff focused on “The In’s and Out’s of Hadrami Journalism in Malaya” during the first four decades of the 20th century. It gave a brief survey of the Malay and Arabic periodicals published by the Hadramis in Malaya, and

assessed their contributions to the development of Malay press and Islamic reformism in the region.

Eight of the 31 conference papers were in Arabic and the rest in English. The papers covered a variety of topics ranging from the ideology of descent to the status of the Yemeni-Hadrami diaspora in the era of globalization. Generally, the papers discussed the issue of the Yemeni- Hadramis in Southeast Asia from three perspectives. The first focused on the origins of the Hadrami immigrants, their role in the Islamisation of Southeast Asia, patterns of their interaction and assimilation in the host societies, and contributions in shaping Islamic thought and education in the region. The second dealt with the commercial and economic institutions of the Hadramis in Southeast Asia, and their role in the development of the modern economic history of the region and the homeland (Hadramaut). It also examined the growth of Arab capitalism, shaped by homeland politics and Islamic institutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The third investigated the role of the Hadrami organisations, schools and press that worked towards the promotion of social, religious and economic reforms in the Hadrami communities in Southeast Asia and the impact of these reforms in Hadramaut.

Closing Remarks

The closing session was addressed by Dr. Abdul Nasser al-Nunibar, Ambassador of the Republic of Yemen, appreciating the conference for opening new vistas of enquiry and understanding of the history of the Hadrami communities in Southeast Asia. Associate Prof. Dr. Hazizan Md. Noon, the Dean of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, in his concluding observations, suggested, among others, that “the Yemeni-Hadrami Conference” should be a model for further scholarly gatherings to study the history of the Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia from various perspectives and show its relevance to contemporary concerns.

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