

## **DATELINE MEI**

**No. 44**

**Friday, 12 April 2013**

**MEI Lecture Series: Understanding Islam**

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**Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**

**T**he Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND) organized a lecture series on *Understanding Islam* from 1-6 April 2013 at the School of International Studies, JNU. The lecture series was focused on understanding Islam as a set of faith and cultural and civilizational heritage as it plays a pivotal role in the individual and collective consciousness of the region and its people. Islam has remained an integral component of the societies, politics, economies, arts and cultures of the region and hence any meaningful academic discourse on the Middle East remains incomplete without a degree of understanding of Islam.

Towards promoting an informed discussion on Islam, the MEI@ND organized the lecture series. The six lectures delivered by **Prof A. K. Pasha** of the Centre for West Asian Studies, SIS, JNU. These lectures evoked enthusiastic participation from students and researchers from JNU and from other institutions within and outside Delhi.

The inaugural lecture on **Pre-Islamic Arabia** focused on the cultural, economic, political and social conditions prevailing in the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam. This session was chaired by Cmdr C. Uday Bhaskar, Chairperson of the Academic Committee of the MEI@ND. On 2 April, the focus was on **Life and Times of Prophet Mohammed** which threw light on the significance attached to the Prophet who was not just a spiritual leader of the community but also emerged as its political leader who established the state of Medinah that became the precursor of the vast Islamic empire. The third lecture centred around **Early Islam** during the time most of the Islamic doctrines—political, social or legal—developed. The sessions on second and third days were chaired by Shyam Babu, chairman of the Forum for Middle Eastern Studies (FMES), the parent body of the MEI@ND.

**Islam and Other Monotheistic Religions** was the topic for the fourth day. The lecture revolved around the philosophical groundings of monotheistic religions, namely Judaism and Christianity. The underlining political differences in the origins of the three monotheistic religions came to the fore during the lecture and the session was chaired by Prof. Rajesh Rajagopalan, a member of the Academic Committee of the MEI@ND.

The fifth lecture focused on **Shariah and Islamic Jurisprudence** that forms the core of the Islamic law. The evolution of Shariah in various stages and the set of components that form Shariah were discussed in detail. The sixth and final day was allocated for discussion on **Different Narratives within Islam** where the emergence of various sects, creeds and schools out of Islam were discussed. It was underlined that the differences within Islam started soon after the death of the prophet and led to larger division as the Islamic state expanded. The last two days of the lecture were chaired by Prof. A. K. Ramakrishnan, chairperson Centre for West Asian Studies, SIS, JNU. On all the days, Dipanwita Chakravorty from the MEI@ND gave the vote of thanks. A certificate of participation would be given to 27 participants who had attended all the six lectures.

Pictures taken by Alvite N during the Lecture Series are available at the MEI Facebook Page: [http://www.facebook.com/pages/Middle-East-InstituteND/288759447887642?sk=photos\\_albums](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Middle-East-InstituteND/288759447887642?sk=photos_albums)

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