

Report on the 9th ISOSS conference

The beautiful green trees and eye catching landscaped surroundings of the Concorde Hotel, Shah Alam, Malaysia attracted over 350 professional Statisticians from all over the world for the 9th Islamic Countries Conference on Statistical Sciences (ICCS-IX) which took place between 12-14 December, 2007. The conference was jointly organised by the Islamic Countries Society of Statistical Sciences (ISOSS) and the Institute of Statistics Malaysia (ISM). During the three day period some 160 papers were presented by the international participants from Europe, North America, Middle East, Australasia and Asia. About 80 papers were also presented by local participants. The presentations included 12 invited sessions on various topics in contemporary statistical research which were very well received by the audience.

The conference was co-sponsored by the Pemodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB), the largest Malaysian Government's Investment Corporation, a number of public universities in Malaysia and the Statistical, Economic, Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC) which is a part of the Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC). The latter consists of 57 member states from Asia, Africa, Europe and South America with Head Office in Ankara, Turkey.

Reflecting on the theme of the conference Statistics in Contemporary World Theories, Methods and Applications the tone of the conference was set by the first keynote speaker Y. Bhg. Tan Sri Dato' Hamad Kama Piah bin Che Othman, President, PNB with 115 billion Malaysian Ringgit annual turnout. Being a Statistics graduate, Mr Othman strongly emphasised the role of Statistics in decision making at the highest level. He also shared his personal experience as to how his statistical background helped him reach the highest echelon of his career. He suggested that only trained and qualified Statisticians should hold any statistics position. He also highlighted the role of the professional organisations in achieving this goal.

The Director General of SESRTCIC, Dr Savas Alpay, chaired the special session organised by SESRTCIC on the activities of various national statistical organisations (NSO). The session was addressed by Dr Unal Gundogan, Vice President of the Turkish Statistical Institute, Ankara, Mr Mohanna Abdulkarim Al-Mohanna, Deputy Director General for Statistical Affairs, Saudi Arabia, and Ms Hajah Wan Ramlah Wan Abd. Raof, Chief Statistician, Malaysia. The session provided a wide range of information on various statistical activities and programs conducted by respective NSO. It was an opportunity for the academics and researchers to get a glance on the current state of statistics in real life, and the various initiatives the NSOs are undertaking to make statistics more relevant to our life and decision making. This is the first time such a special session was devoted to the official statistics in an ISOSS conference.

On the nomination of Professor Denise Livesnley, President of the International Statistical Institute (ISI), Netherlands, Professor Stephan Morgenthaler of Switzerland represented the ISI in the conference. This was an outcome of closer contact between the ISOSS and ISI. The recent meeting between the President of ISI with Dr Shahjahan Khan, President of ISOSS, at the First Arab Statistics Conference in Amman, Jordan during 12-13 November 2007 has opened doors for increased cooperation between the two professional organisations devoted to the development of statistics at an international level. The common interest of both ISI and ISOSS is to involve more statisticians in their activities, particularly attracting members from developing countries with particular emphasis on our female colleagues. The conference was also attended by Dr Abullateef Bello, Chief of Data Resource Centre of Jeddah (KSA) based Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

In 1999 ISOSS introduced the award of the ISOSS Gold Medal for outstanding contribution in the development of statistics and services to ISOSS. During the Conference Dinner, on the evening of 12 December 2007, the winners of ICCS-IX Gold Medal were declared. The recipients were Munir Ahmad (Founding President of ISOSS), Shahjahan Khan (Australia), Ali S Hadi (Egypt) and Hanif Mian (Pakistan). ISOSS also recognised the outstanding contributions of a number of members on the Local Organising Committee as well as the ISM with the award of the ISOSS Crest.

Professor Ali S Hadi, Cornell University, USA and American University of Cairo, Egypt presented his keynote talk on a general method of detection of outliers for both linear and nonlinear models. The proposed method works for normal as well as non-normal models and is based on a Maholanobis-type distance. Professor Kerrie Mengersen, Queensland University of Technology, Australia presented her keynote speech on the Bayesian priors. In addition to covering a wide range of priors and their underlying reasons, Kerrie provided many applications where a particular prior would be appropriate. She brought in examples from medical, wildlife and environmental areas from Australias great-barrier-reef to African Cheetahs. Professor Malay Ghosh, University of Florida, USA gave the last keynote presentation on the role of ancillary statistics in statistical inference. His talk covered classical as well as empirical Bayes applications. Unfortunately, another keynote speaker, Professor A K Md Ehsanes Saleh, Carleton University, Canada was unable to participate in the conference due to his doctors restriction on travelling long flights.

The current state of the ICT and its origin from Statistics and Mathematics were covered in a special talk by Professor Hilal Al-Bayyati, Director General, Arab Institute of Training and Research for Statistics (AIRTS), Jordan. Referring to his recent investigation he surprised the audience by revealing the fact that in the Arab countries less than 25for Statistics are occupied by statistics graduates. He also noted that ICT is merely technology, but Statisticians are the ones who create the information from data via various statistical methods, and hence they should be viewed accordingly.

A memorial lecture on Emeritus Professor M Safiul Haq (1935-2007) of the University

of Western Ontario, Canada was presented by one of his most successful PhD students, Professor Shahjahan Khan, University of Southern Queensland, Australia. The speaker highlighted the various aspects of Professor Haq's life and personality along with his significant research contributions in the area of predictive inference. Based on the idea of Frasers (1968, 1978) structural distribution method to derive the prediction distributions, Haq (1982) proposed the structural relation approach which avoids complicated multi-dimensional integration and derivation of structural distribution. This was the first ever memorial lecture at an ISOSS conference.

ISOSS started its journey in August 1988 from Lahore, Pakistan during the ICCS-I. Visionary leadership and the dedication of Professor Munir Ahmad and his esteemed team had succeeded in organising 8 biennial conferences, and had established the ISOSS as a reputed regional organisation. Recently Professor Ahmad has bought and donated a property in Lahore to house the ISOSS Head Quarters. One of the main objectives of the ICCS-IX has been to take the ISOSS globally and reach out to all professional statisticians regardless of nationality, race, gender and religion. Surely, ICCS-IX has paved the way to achieve this goal, and taking a global role for the development of the discipline of Statistics and the profession.

The conference dinner was held on the evening of 12 December in the Concorde Hotel. A wide variety of Malaysian cuisine constituted the menu. The performances by young boys and the children from a local orphanage attracted very high appreciation from the participants. The songs, dances, music etc were different but very professional and amusing. Many participants donated money for the children of the orphanage.

The closing session was chaired by the Chief Statistician of Malaysia Ms Hajah Wan Ramlah Wan Abd. Raof. The Secretary of the Local Organising Committee, Dr Ibrahim Mohamed presented a brief report in the session. Professor Stephan Morgenthaler spoke on behalf of the international participants and Associate Professor Shafie Mehad presented the views of the local participants.

In line with the tradition of its previous conferences the ISOSS will publish the proceedings of the conference. However, a selected number of papers from the conference will be published in a special volume of the Journal of Applied Probability and Statistics (JAPS), Dixie W Publishing, USA and the Pakistan Journal of Statistics (PJS) with peer review.

ISOSS regrets not being able to meet the requests for travel grants from many potential participants whose papers were accepted from developing countries. This was due to lack of funds. I hope this matter would receive serious consideration in the future ISOSS conferences. This is important as it would show much needed support and commitment towards the researchers from developing countries who miss out on these educational and personal development opportunities due to lack of funds.

Last, but not the least, I visited a number of universities in Malaysia in January 2006 and January-February 2007 in preparation for the ICCS-IX. I am really indebted to Dato' Prof. Dr. Jamil Bin Hj. Osman, President of the Malaysia Institute of Statistics and Dean of Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences, IIUM; the current and immediate past Chief Statistician of Malaysia; Dato' Prof. Dr. Hj. Kamel Ariffin Mohd. Atan, Director of Institute of Mathematical Research, University Putra Malaysia; and Prof. Dr. Noor Hasnah Moin, Head of Institute of Mathematical Sciences, University Malaysia for their initiatives, encouragement, and ongoing support to the successful conclusion of the ISOSS conference. The remarkable leadership of Dr. Ibrahim Mohamed, Secretary of the Local Organising Committee and his esteemed team of volunteers have been very well recognised by the participants.

Shahjahan Khan, PhD
President, ISOSS (www.isoss.com.pk)
Department of Mathematics & Computing
University of Southern Queensland, AUSTRALIA