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A plea for rationality in enforcing Islamic codes in Malaysia

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IT is gratifying that there was an outcry against the arrests of three Muslim beauty contestants recently. It showed Malaysians are concerned about justice and abhor the over-zealous behaviour of the Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor enforcement officers.

On July 16, a senior JAIS officer was indicted for defalcating RM180,000 from the zakat accounts of its Kuala Langat office. This is a sin and, of course, it reflects badly on JAIS. If JAIS wants to police the Muslims, it must itself be beyond reproach.

JAIS should not be naive to associate, be used or influenced by political conspiracies in the State.

The religious affairs departments of Malaysia must establish priorities if they are to police the eternal interests of Islam in Malaysia. These include:

- * Research and verify by quantitative methods social ills and publicise the findings.
- * Enforce the payments of alimonies to destitute wives and the children.
- * Enforce the law on those who are in contempt of the Syariah courts, particularly the elites.
- * Visit and counsel the imam of suburban mosques to modulate the azan calls. Today, the call to prayer is too loud and this is inconsiderate to our non-Muslim brethren. Prophet Muhammad would never have agreed. In any case, Malaysia suffers from an azan overkill - on TV and radio.
- * Counsel some Muslim televangelists who fiercely present their cases like demagogues. They should be presentable and avoid being facile and asinine.

In 1967, the Muslim Arabs were so completely defeated by the Israelis that the humiliation should have led them to acknowledge whether there was something rotten in the expression of their moral system. Today, in most Muslim countries, there are frequent displays of irrationality, a manifestation of disturbed societies.

We, in this country, do realise and cherish our stability and the quantum leap to prosperity. On the other hand, we must be reminded that a religion to a person is "what stems from the givens". If it is not properly harnessed, it is a time-bomb for primordial ethnic conflicts. This is the most compelling reason why Malaysians must NOT borrow from the Middle East where there is a shortage of role-models. On July 18, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that we must analyse the Quran and focus the interpretation to our times.

Pakistani scholar Fazlul Rahman in his book, *Islam and Modernity*, tries to explain the countervailing force to the "spiritual panic" of the ummah. He presents a methodology that we must be true to the spirit of Islam but provide for the necessities of modernity. The Quran was a "divine response", through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia. You need to synthesise the "divine response" to a general principle intrinsic to it. The Quran needs to be studied on how and why a response was revealed. Then, we can look at which general principle that we clearly require. Today, there is an engineering miracle on Mars; let us not be dragged backwards then.

Any institution that gives itself the complete monopoly of wisdom and reason lives in delusion.

In 1974, poet Nizar Qabbani published *Political Works*. In one poem, the

speaker confesses having murdered an imam who had lulled the faithful with mere words:

In killing him I have killed
All the weeds in the garden of Islam
All who seek a living in the shops of Islam
In killing him, honoured Sirs, I have killed
All those who, for a thousand years,
Have been fornicating with speech.

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