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Moving forward as one

THERE is no option for the homo Islamicus intent on fulfilling his destiny as the vicegerent of God but to embark on a true jihad (holy war) and orchestrate the renaissance of Islam.

This was the crux of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's message to American Muslims who accorded him a warm welcome as befitting the spirit of brotherhood advocated by Islam. One impression dominates. Despite the United States-sponsored programme of "clash of civilisations", a confrontational and ideological framework that constitutes its foreign policy towards Muslim nations, the American Muslims show an independence in determining who serves as the exemplary Muslim leader in today's world. Thus, in the words of the American Muslim Council, Dr Mahathir is a symbol of Islamic development.

But there is one exception to this consensus and that lies with the Islamic Society of North America, which appeared to suffer from momentary amnesia when it issued the invitation to Dr Mahathir to address its convention in Rosemont, Illinois, long after the commencement of judicial proceedings against former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, but only to withdraw it upon sudden recovery. Prerogatives aside, its vague assertion that the withdrawal was because dozens of its members were unhappy with Dr Mahathir over Anwar's incarceration smacks not only of hypocrisy and frivolousness, unbecoming of an educated body that supposedly champions the Islamic course and values, but of political mischief designed to embarrass Dr Mahathir.

Of course, Isna is free to erect itself as a lackey of Anwar or perhaps, an echo of certain Western powers whose thinly-veiled hatred for Dr Mahathir's candour and hawk-eye ability to cut through the garb of neo-liberal economic-led globalisation and reveal the hidden injustices has almost reached the level of the US-sponsored anti-Saddam policy.

But the discomfiture shown by others in the American Muslim fraternity leaves little doubt that Isna is an unfortunate exception in today's ummah, which is increasingly conscious of unity's imperative. If there is a moral to be learned, it is that pettiness and narrow-mindedness, long the sources of strife and disunity in the Islamic world, continues to fascinate some Muslims.

This apart, Dr Mahathir's call for jihad is one that goes beyond the narrow confines of the jihad as propagated by some ulamas, whose thirst for political power comes heavily under the guise of a struggle for the pristine purity of Islam. It is a jihad to strive for knowledge, unity with tolerance for differences of opinion and acquisition of Muslim statecraft, knowledge and technology. Dr Mahathir's jihad is different from the likes of Terengganu Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang's jihad which pits Muslims against Muslims.

Yet Dr Mahathir's jihad is fundamental in the true sense of the much-abused word. It is fundamental because it will put Muslims as the locus of knowledge and equitable custodian and just trustee of the world and its resources and state of affairs. The Malaysia-led RM570 million venture in Silicon Valley is an example of an enterprise in pursuit of knowledge and development that is beneficial and contributive to Muslims worldwide and, particularly, for all Malaysians who will benefit from the economic spin-offs of its manufacturing arm in the Multimedia Super Corridor.

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