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Breeding Islamic dynamism

PERHAPS it would be premature to expect the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World to be the seedbed of dynamic Islamic intellectualism.

We note that although it was conceived in 1987, it was only recently that the FUIW has drawn up a proper charter with the accompanying rules, regulations and statutes to govern itself. We do not deny that the absence or lack of a proper organisational structure is not necessarily an obstacle to success or progress. Then again, it seems that structural planning, strategic thinking, efficacy and speed are not among the strengths of the contemporary Islamic world.

The harsh truth is that several organisations set up for the advancement of Islam have produced little progress and success. Some are talk-shops, some have agendas that are long on hype and short on substance and some are engulfed by an obsession with petty issues. These may well be linked to the failure of Muslims in seeing the faith beyond ritualistic terms, a factor that explains their indifference to worldly knowledge and defeatist attitude towards material development and progress.

In many ways, Muslims tend to possess emotive faith rather than intellectual faith. Although the Quran and Sunnah are the repository of knowledge, most see them as personal pietistic texts. Collective cognitive efforts in translating the vision of the Quranic weltanschauung into contemporary and material terms do not seem enough. Nor have cries for intellectual jihad produced a sense of urgency with which Muslims should be tackling their state of underdevelopment.

The ummah appears to be enervated by the lack of effective Islamic thinking and scholarship and substitution of cliché-mongering for substantial intellectual endeavour.

As observed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the official opening of the International Islamic University Malaysia and second general conference of the FUIW, "the Muslim countries missed the industrial revolution completely. Now we are likely to miss the information age and the concomitant globalisation also. We are simply not prepared for these radical changes in technology and the relation between nations".

So too it needs to be told that "there appears to be no possibility that a Muslim country would emerge as a world power in the foreseeable future, no matter how big they are". This should be a wake-up call for the ummah to engage themselves in an intellectual jihad. Unity is essential but again, this is also lacking. Differences of opinion should be subsumed in the larger interest of the ummah.

That said, there is good reason in investing in institutions that can enhance Islamic intellectual productivity. The IIUM is an example of how islamisation of knowledge can produce graduates who do not turn their back against the world on account of religion, but instead engage themselves vigorously with the world to fulfil the believer's role as khalifatullah or God's vicegerents.

By all means, the FUIW should be seen as an umbrella organisation for all upholders of Islamic learning who must bear the primary responsibility of islamising the so-called secular knowledge through creative, intellectual endeavours. Its potential is immense. Which is why we feel let down by its previous lack of vigour.

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