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'Palestine is key to peace'

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THIS Summit Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the first to be held in the new century, indeed the new millennium, is taking place at a most crucial time. The world now lives in fear. We are afraid of everything. We are afraid of flying, afraid of certain countries; afraid of bearded Asian men, afraid of the shoes airline passengers wear; of letters and parcels, of white powder.

The countries allegedly harbouring terrorists, their people, innocent or otherwise, are afraid too. They are afraid of war, of being killed and maimed by bombs being dropped on them, by missiles fired from hundreds of miles away by unseen forces.

They are afraid because they would become the collaterals to be killed because they get in the way of the destruction of their countries.

The preparations and the measures taken to ensure security go on frantically. Trillions of dollars are spent by the world on new weapons, new technology, new strategy; the deployment of forces and inspectors worldwide.

Those who cannot afford these security measures must simply await their fate and trust in God. Yet despite all this, terrorist attacks have taken place where they are least expected, killing the collaterals again.

There is still no guarantee that the well-dressed, clean-shaven family man next door might not become another hijacker, crashing his aircraft into buildings and killing collaterals.

In the meantime, the economy of the world has slowed down and in some instances has been reversed, with huge deficits burdening countries. Jobs are lost and poverty is increasing even in the rich countries. No new investments in foreign countries or at home.

With the threat of war oil prices have shot up, increasing further the economic and social burdens of the poor countries.

Aid for the poor has practically stopped and loans are not available as the poor countries default and default again.

Truly, the world is in a terrible mess, a state that is worse than during the East-West confrontation, the Cold War. All the great hopes following the end of the Cold War have vanished. And with the terrorists and the anti-terrorists fumbling blindly in their fight against each other, normalcy will not return for quite a long while.

Surely, at some stage, we must ask ourselves why this is happening to the world. Why is there terrorism? Is it true that the Muslims are born terrorists because of the teachings of a prophet who was a terrorist?

How do we explain the pogroms, the inquisitions and the holocaust which characterised Christian Europe for almost 2000 years? Why did the Jews choose to seek haven in Muslim countries whenever Christian Europeans persecuted them? Do people seek safety in the land of terrorists? Does not sound very likely.

The Christians too were terrorised, not by Muslims but by fellow Christians who condemned them as heretics. They were persecuted, tortured, burnt at the stake for their beliefs and forced to migrate.

Seems that the Muslims did not have a monopoly of terrorism, certainly not on the scale of the holocaust, the pogroms and the inquisition.

So it cannot be that Muslims are the sole cause of all these problems. If they are not then is it a clash of civilisations, a clash of the Muslim civilisation with the Judaeo-Christian civilisation, that is responsible?

Frankly, I do not think so. Frankly, I think it is because of a revival of the old European trait of wanting to dominate the world. And the expression of this trait invariably involves injustice and oppression of people of other ethnic origins and colours.

If we care to think back, there was no systematic campaign of terror outside Europe until the Europeans and the Jews created a Jewish state out of Palestinian land. Incidentally, terrorism was first used by the Haganah and the Irgun Zvai Leumi to persuade the British to set up Israel.

The Palestinians were actually ejected from their homes and their country and forced to live in miserable refugee camps for more than 50 years now.

It is the struggle of the Palestinians to regain their land that has precipitated, first conventional wars, then civil protest and, eventually, violent demonstrations.

The Israelis demanded European support to atone for European crimes against them in the past. In desperation the Palestinians finally resorted to what is described as acts of terror. Rightly, this is condemned by the world.

But the world does not condemn as acts of terror the more terrifying acts of the Israelis; the massacres in Sabra and Shatila, the shooting and killing of children, the use of depleted uranium-coated bullets, the bulldozing of Palestinian homes while the occupants are still in them, the helicopter gunships, etc. And Israel is now threatening to use nuclear weapons.

This blatant double standard is what infuriates Muslims; infuriates them to the extent of launching their own terror attacks. If Iraq is linked to al-Qaeda, is it not more logical to link the expropriation of Palestinian land and the persecution and oppression of the Palestinians with Sept 11?

It is not religious differences that angered the attackers of the World Trade Center. It is simply sympathy and anger over the expropriation of Palestinian land, over the injustice and the oppression of the Palestinians, and Muslims everywhere.

If the innocent people who died in the attack on Afghanistan, and those who have been dying from lack of food and medical care in Iraq, are considered collaterals, are not the 3,000 who died in New York and the 200 in Bali also just collaterals whose deaths are necessary for the operations to succeed?

Actually, the life of any human being is sacred, no matter if the person is a friend or an enemy. That is why war is not a solution. A contest based on who can kill more people in order to establish who is the victor and who the loser, worse still in order to determine who is right and who is wrong is primitive and does not speak well of the so-called high level of civilisation we have achieved.

The greatness of a nation should be based on a culture that values high moral qualities, aesthetics, learning and advancement in the sciences. Unfortunately, thousands of years after the Stone Age we still measure the greatness of a nation by the capacity to slaughter the greatest number of people.

But the oppression and injustice is not confined to waging war and killing people; there is oppression in ideological propagation. We are now allowed only a democratic system of government.

We admit it is by far the best system of government. But applying sanctions, starving people, denying access to medicine in order to force the acceptance of democracy hardly seem to be democratic.

Actually, millions have died because they have not converted to this new religion. And millions more are suffering because they are unable to make democracy work, because of the resulting anarchy.

Relieved of the need to compete with the Communists, the capitalist free traders have ceased to show a friendly face. Their greed knows no bounds. They want countries that fought hard to gain independence to give up that independence, to do away with their borders, to allow the capitalists free access to do what they like to the economies of these countries. They call this free competition.

As they merge and acquire each other, they become monstrous giants against whom the small businesses in the developing countries will not be able to compete. What is the meaning of competition if you cannot win at all? In the end, a few of these monsters will control the economy of the whole world.

The sad thing is that they are not above cheating and corruption. And we know they can fail. We have seen how spectacularly they fail, losing 100 billion dollars in one year. And that is only one corporation.

Then there are the rogue currency traders who destroyed the economies of half the world, threw tens of millions out of work, bankrupted banks and thousands of businesses, caused the collapse of governments and precipitated anarchy; all so that half a dozen individuals can make billions for themselves.

Now the rich give no more aid. They do not lend either. And all the time the international agencies they control try to strangle the debt-laden poor countries which had been attacked by their greedy market manipulators.

The disparities between rich and poor widen daily. The rich have per capita incomes of more than 30,000 US dollars, the poor only 300 US dollars. Still the rich want to squeeze out literally the last drop of blood from the poor.

It is this that plagues the world today, this oppression of the poor by the rich; this injustice, this inequality. To rub salt into the wound, the poor are always being told that they lack transparency and good governance, they don't respect human rights, they don't uphold freedom of speech, freedom of the press and so on and so forth, when in fact it is the rich who lack transparency, who do not respect human rights, who curb our right to speak the truth about what they are doing, who use their media to hide their misdeeds and spread lies.

How else can we interpret the operations of the hedge funds and the currency traders, sanctions and the systematic bombing of certain countries, the impoverishment of the already poor, and the censorship of news as well as distorted and fabricated reports about the South?

The fact is that the poor countries have been and are being oppressed and terrorised by the rich countries. Naturally, the poor are bitter and angry and have lost faith in justice and honour. And the last straw which caused them to resort to futile and destructive terror attacks is the blatant support for state terrorism as practised by Israel and others.

If Israeli terrorism is a response to Palestinian terrorism, then Palestinian terrorism, and terror acts by their sympathisers must be due to the expulsion of Palestinians from their land, the further occupation of Palestinian territory and the open support for Israeli intransigence and terrorism by the Europeans.

But the developing countries must admit that we are also responsible for the mess the world is in today. We have not used our independence and freedom to develop our countries for the good of our people. Instead, we have been busy overthrowing our governments, setting up new governments which in turn would be overthrown. We have even killed our own people by the millions. And frequently, frustrated with anarchic democracy we resort to autocratic governments, exposing ourselves to much vilification.

The result of this confrontation between the haves and the have nots,

the developed and the developing, is a world that is practically ungovernable. Despite all the advances in science and technology, the world is in a terrible state. With more than enough food to feed the six billion people of the world, fully one in six is actually underfed, starving, with hundreds dying daily.

Since Sept 11, the rich and the powerful have become enraged with the poor half of the world. And their extreme measures to ensure security for themselves have only amplified the anger of the oppressed poor. Both sides are now in a state of blind anger and are bent on killing each other, on war.

War solves nothing. War is primitive. Today's war is more primitive than Stone Age wars. The targets are not the fighters, the combatants. The target is the ordinary civilians, the women, children and old people. Whether it is terror attacks or military action, these are the victims.

In primitive wars the carnage is witnessed by the warriors. While the suicidal terrorists die with each attack, the great warriors who press the buttons see nothing of the mangled bodies, the heads and limbs which are torn from disembowelled bodies, the blood and the gore of the innocent people who an instant before were living people like them.

And because they don't see, the button-pressing warriors and the people who commanded them go back to enjoy a hearty meal, watch TV shows or morale-boosting troop entertainers and then retire to their cosy beds for a good sleep.

Tomorrow they will make more sorties, to carpet-bomb more children, women and old people or press more buttons to send missiles to tear off more heads and limbs.

War is about slaughtering people. Newer and more brutal weapons are being invented to kill more people more efficiently. And now there is talk that the use of nuclear weapons is justified. Is it because the people to be slaughtered are chromatically different? Is it because they cannot hit back?

Our meeting here today is a meeting of heads of state and heads of government. We must admit that our organisation has not been as effective as it should be. We may want to remain uninvolved and to avoid incurring the displeasure of the powerful countries.

But our people are getting restless. They want us to do something. If we don't then they will, and they will go against us. They will take things into their own hands. Unable to mount a conventional war they will resort to guerilla war, to terrorism, against us and against those they consider to be their oppressors.

They cannot be ignored any longer. We cannot incarcerate them all for we do not always know who they are or where they are.

Sept 11 has demonstrated to the world that acts of terror even by a dozen people can destabilise the whole world completely, put fear into the hearts of everyone, make them afraid of their own shadows.

But their acts have also removed all the restraint in the countries of the north. They now no longer respect borders, international law or even simple moral values. And they are now talking of wars, of the use of military conquests in order to change governments. They are even talking of using nuclear weapons.

It is no longer just a war against terrorism. It is, in fact, a war to dominate the world, i.e., the chromatically different world. We are now being accused of harbouring terrorists, of being an "Axis of Evil", etc.

NAM has a lot of problems and issues which it must tackle. But at the moment the most important threat that we face is the tendency of the powerful to wage war when faced with opposition to the spread of their dominance. We cannot fight a war with them.

Fortunately, many of their people are also sick of war. They have come out in their millions to protest the war-like policies of their leaders. We must join them. We must join their struggle with all the moral force that we can command.

War must be outlawed. That will have to be our struggle for now. We must struggle for justice and freedom from oppression, from economic hegemony. But we must remove the threat of war first. With this Sword of Damocles hanging over our heads we can never succeed in advancing the interests of our countries.

War must, therefore, be made illegal. The enforcement of this must be by multilateral forces under the control of the United Nations. No single nation should be allowed to police the world, least of all to decide what action to take, when.

Globalisation must not be confined to the exploitation of the wealth of the earth only. Globalisation must include the multilateral protection of countries threatened by war or hegemony.

There must be a new world order in which power is shared equitably by all. The United Nations must be reformed. It must no longer be bound by the results of a world war fought more than half a century ago. Everyone must disarm. Weapons of mass destruction must be disallowed for all. And there should be no more research into making conventional weapons more lethal.

If it is right for an international agency in a globalised world to oversee human rights, business practices and the kind of democracy practised by countries, then a truly international agency beholden only to the United Nations General Assembly should oversee the military budget of all countries, big and small.

Trading in arms must come under United Nations supervision. Brutal ethnic cleansing must be stopped by a multinational standing army.

When Japan was defeated, it was allowed to spend only one per cent of its GDP on its armed forces. If such a condition can be imposed on Japan, why can it not be imposed on all countries?

In the struggle to outlaw war and control arms, nuclear as well as conventional, NAM will find growing support from among many people in the North. It is a daunting task, nevertheless.

But unless we take the moral high ground now, we will wait in vain for the powerful North to voluntarily give up slaughtering people in the name of national interest.

Again, I would like to say that NAM must struggle to outlaw war. NAM must struggle to outlaw nuclear weapons. NAM must struggle to stop the research and development of more and more lethal so called conventional weapons. NAM must struggle to control the arms trade.

We must work for a new world order, where democracy is not confined to the internal governance of states only but to the governance of the world. We must work for the revival of the United Nations and multilateralism. We must work to do away or modify the powers of the victors of a war fought half a century ago.

We know we are weak. But we also know we have allies in the North. They too want the abolition of wars, the slaughter of people for whatever reason.

They may not agree with us on everything. But in the opposition to war very many will be with us. They are ready to oppose their warlike leaders. We must work with them.

This then is our struggle. We are not irrelevant. We are not anachronistic. We have a vision, the vision to build a new world order, a world order that is more equitable, more just; a world order that is, above all, free from the age-old belief that killing people is right, that

it can solve the problems of relations between nations.

For all this we must revitalise the Non-Aligned Movement. And that vitality can only come from our closing ranks and acting together.

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak before this august assembly. Malaysia pledges to work vigorously to oppose war, including the war against Iraq, and to ensure the success of this, our Movement.