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Neither atonement nor time can erase West's Holocaust guilt

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BURDENED as they are by unimaginable guilt born of years of pogroms culminating in the Holocaust that wiped out six million Jews, Europeans - most especially Germans - are quick to taint others as anti-Semites.

And so, when the Prime Minister, speaking as the OIC chairman, criticised the Jewish State and its supporters for the brutal treatment of Palestinians, referring to them as the enemy, Western leaders and their lackeys have castigated him and labelled him an anti-Semite.

That Israel is the enemy within the context of the Middle East agenda surely cannot be refuted. Fifty years of being among the Arabs have not brought peaceful co-existence, one which respects the human rights of Palestinians abandoned in refugee camps in their own land. Tel Aviv, in those 50 years, has made little effort to help restore the dignity of a sovereign people displaced in the name of atonement by powers representing centuries of accumulated guilt.

And, were the atonement truly sincere it would not have needed Jewish guerillas to solve the problem of a race unwelcome by Europeans despite centuries of being in their midst. If not for the genocide attempt by Adolf Hitler, Jews would have gone on being the target of European wrath each time bloodletting is deemed necessary. That Jews needed protection from the disingenuous politics of the old Europe is a fact of history.

Contrast this with the so-called Oriental Jews who lived for centuries in the Arab midst without persecution. Admittedly their religion did not flourish but their persons had the kind of security envied by their European brothers. Muslims harboured prejudices against the Jews, yes, but they did not bear them any grudges. Until, that is, the dispossession of the Palestinians, done without consultation with those affected, by the European imperial powers.

The Arabs deplored the carving up of Palestine to make way for Israel; a State to be peopled by European Jewish immigrants whose only right to settle in this biblical land is flimsy, if at all. Against the backdrop of the contemporary West's secularism, this religious claim is even more unjustifiable. Furthermore, why should Europeans who are unable to find sanctuary in their own countries be bestowed the right of residence in what is, without question, the land of the Arabs? This latter race peopled the area continuously for millennia.

Those who have roundly condemned Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as anti-Semitic may feel, too, that what is essentially an Arab problem has nothing to do with Islam and hence the OIC. But, the Arab lands are the Muslim heartland. It is where Muslims worldwide draw their inspiration from. While Muslims do not indeed constitute a race as the Jewish peoples have become over time, they do though subscribe to the concept of the ummah, which transcends the boundaries of nation states. Thus, a brotherhood and fraternity is spawned.

The Arab agenda, then, becomes a Muslim agenda, which in turn makes it an OIC agenda.

These points having been made, it is still a mystery why a speech criticising the enemy of Palestine has been cast in very Eurocentric perspectives. Anti-Semitism is alien to Muslims for the very simple fact that Arabs are Semites, too. Why is the West tarnishing a co-religionist of a Semitic religion with a brush born of its own prejudices?

Some argue that it is the Western media that have given the story this

spin. If we are to believe that a devious media alone can mislead the vast majority of Western leaders, then we are giving these leaders very little intellectual will, which cannot be true. Rather, it is becoming apparent that the Western political and economic agenda is moving farther away from the ideals they preach.

For instance, not too long ago the US led the illegal invasion of Iraq. According to certain European leaders, the move could not be easily retrospectively legalised by a UN resolution.

Today that legality is almost achieved. The first step towards that end has been voted for unanimously by the Security Council. That this US need was not used as leverage to gain condemnation of Israel's bombing of Syria, the bargaining for which was occurring simultaneously, is indicative of a less than consistent humanitarian stand.

Muslims are angry with the Jewish State, more so in recent months. Not only are they witnessing the emasculation of an elected Palestinian leader, they are also incensed by the recent bombing of Syria for the very humane reason of giving sanctuary to Palestinian refugees. After all, even Tel Aviv was loath to claim absolute proof linking the Haifa bombers to the Syrian target camp. Those wanting to make that link were Washington, London and Madrid, in a draft UN Security Council resolution that would see the light of day only on the condition that the disputable link was made.

It is by now obvious that the aggrieved Muslim world cannot depend on its Western allies, not even to understand its sensitivities. Instead, the Orient and the Occident remain worlds apart with Eurocentrism remaining hale and hearty. The world is expected to view everything, including their adversity, in European terms.

To react critically to Ariel Sharon's militarism is to be anti-Semitic. To view Israel as an enemy is to be anti-Semitic. To note with some admiration and highlight the strength of the Jewish diaspora is to be anti-Semitic.

As such, it is difficult not to agree with Dr Mahathir that any criticism of Israel is unacceptable to the West. Are the Muslims then expected to take the current Israeli abuse of the war on terrorism, which is hurting them most, with equanimity? Are they not entitled to stand up for themselves?

That the condemnation was voiced without regard for the overall intent of the speech, which calls for an end to suicide bombings, is further evidence of people whose guilt is not so easily alleviated. It is becoming apparent that neither atonement nor time can ease a conscience that made possible the attempted genocide of European Jews.