

21/08/2003

`World recognises only might'

DR MAHATHIR'S views on progressive Islam found good response from the Syrian Islamic scholars and leaders. They were greatly appreciative of Dr Mahathir's frank opinions, and one scholar urged him to write a book on Malaysia's development in line with Islamic teachings.

The dialogue was chaired by Mohamad Ziadah, Minister of Endowments.

PM: I'm sure that you will agree with me that today the Muslim ummah is being oppressed and Islam itself is being insulted. The Prophet of Islam has been described as a terrorist.

Muslims today cannot defend themselves. They can be arrested, they can be tried anywhere and they can be sentenced to death even. Muslim countries are not able to protect Islam or the Muslims.

We have become extremely weak. This is a fact that we have to admit. We can claim that we only appear to be oppressed but actually, we are triumphant, we are doing very well, the fact is that we have lost the glory of the past Muslim empire.

In those days, nobody would dare to oppress the Muslims because we were strong in every way, strong in terms of our knowledge, in terms of our Government, in terms of military capability.

Yes, there were attempts to invade Muslim countries but the leaders were able to defend Muslim territory successfully. But at the beginning of the last century, the Muslims began to weaken, and the Ottoman empire collapsed and was divided up into many nation States.

The States are not united, instead they are subjected to pressure and manipulation by outside forces. The Muslims became weaker and weaker, and more and more ignorant.

Some of us say that we need not acquire modern knowledge, that it's secular knowledge, that we only need to study the religion and theology, and that other knowledge can't bring us any merit.

The result: Muslims are intellectually backward and are quite incapable of competing with the detractors and enemies of Islam.

We have been enjoined by our religion to protect ourselves, yet we don't have armies that have defence equipment. Instead we need the help of those who are not sympathetic to us. We have to rely on them for our needs and defence.

We have neglected the need to acquire knowledge. In the early years, the Muslims had knowledge. The non-Muslims had to come to Muslim countries to acquire knowledge. They had to learn Arabic.

But there came a time that the study of these things was considered as non-essential. Since then, we had neglected the study of science, mathematics, medicine etc.

We have neglected what is enjoined to us, and required by our religion. We are endowed with riches and wealth, but are incapable of using it.

The Quran begins with an injunction to read. To read is to acquire knowledge. Is knowledge only about religion or knowledge as a whole? Obviously, we have to acquire all knowledge that is available.

Yes, we are very religious but the world recognises only strength today. If you are strong, you are respected. It is the law of the jungle where might is right, but the fact is that the world recognises strength. If you are weak, you will be oppressed, your country will be invaded and you will live under the power of powerful nations.

I believe this has happened because we had neglected the fundamental

teachings of Islam. In Malaysia, we believe in fundamentalism, and focus on the original teachings of Islam.

We neglected what is fundamental to Islam and instead, we focus on issues that do not contribute to the development of the Muslim ummah.

We are more interested in minor differences in the interpretations of Islam. There was only one religion of Islam but we are divided into many different sects, and because we have different beliefs, there is conflict between us and such conflict merely weakens us.

We tried to unite the Muslim ummah but it has not proven possible. Until now, in organisations like the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, we are not united even in our stand on the issue of the oppression of the Palestinians by the Israelis.

Emboldened by their success in oppressing Palestinians, they are now oppressing Muslims in other countries. They now want to change the Government of many Muslim countries, and we have seen it happen in Afghanistan and Iraq, and maybe even in Syria as they have already said the Syrian Government is not the type of Government they want.

We are being threatened by the big powers, that is because we are not united. Even if we are weak, if we have one voice, we can influence the course of the world.

We have to accept that this is the truth, it is a fact today. Is it because Islam is a religion that cannot accommodate modern way of living? I don't think so. Islam is not only for the seventh century or the first century of Hijrah. It is for all times and places. But many of us think that the only way is to go back to the first century of Hijrah, or the seventh century AD.

But if Islam is for all time, surely, it is suitable for today as it was 1,400 years ago. If 1,400 years ago Islam could become a great civilisation, it cannot be said that today because our environment has changed, we are no longer capable of achieving the great Islamic civilisation of the past.

I am quite sure that it's not our religion that is wrong, it is perhaps our interpretation of our religion that is wrong, it is perhaps because we are not really following the religion of Islam.

Instead, we are following our own needs and base desires. That is why we find we are unable to agree with each other, and then of course, we can be manipulated by our enemies.

We cannot express our anger by killing people, we are not getting anywhere with that. That is why we are against terrorism. Malaysia wants to become a developed nation, to have all its capability, most in terms of wealth and intellectual capacity, so that we can compete with them and maintain our independence and the well-being of the Muslims.

Q: You have talked about Islam being on one side and Muslims on the other side, as they are not following the true teachings of Islam. Now, Islam is accused of terrorism, yet it is the true religion. I wish you all the best as you are in the correct direction. You have called for us to unite. How do you see the role of Islamic movements and scholars?

A: There are many movements. Some want to spread Islam, but some are not thinking about teaching the true meaning of Islam. They are campaigning for support for their political objectives.

As an example, in my country, a Muslim scholar said that Allah is a rogue, the biggest rogue. We were shocked. Of course, we can translate one of the names of Allah to mean that, but surely, it is not meant to be that.

And that Allah uses obscene words; I tried to find them in the Quran if there are any obscene words there, there are none.

He (the Muslim scholar) said that because one of his leaders used

obscene words. In order to say that the leader is not wrong, he said even Allah uses obscene words.

So when we have Islamic scholars more interested in politics, then you are going to have wrong interpretations of Islam.

It confuses the Muslim ummah; which one is right?

The interpretation of Islam to fit objectives that are not Islamic, they confuse the people. The intention is to get something for oneself.

The Islamic scholars are important but we cannot believe everything. It is important to determine what is right and wrong.

Today, there are so many interpretations, and sometimes they are against each other.

I've been described as an infidel by this group. Can we accept that? I don't know, they want to describe me as a non-Muslim. Because of wrong interpretation, we fight against each other.

I think the scholars should come together and try and reach a consensus on the true teachings of Islam.

Q: I thank you for your opening remarks, they were very carefully considered and accurate. I agree with your understanding of humanity. Islam is a religion of mercy for all humanity. The message of Christianity is also of love and mercy. Islam has a system for life. We are happy with the prosperity and morality that Malaysia has reached, while many Islamic countries are backward. Syria wants to follow you, and to overtake you!

A: There are many instances where people make use of religion in order to do things that are against the religion. They say that they are fighting for Christianity when in fact, what they wanted was to conquer other people's land when the Crusaders came here.

Muslims, too, use Islam in order to justify things. Killing innocent people is not part of Islam but they tried hard to hide behind Islam.

I visited the Umayyad Mosque just now, and my perception of Islam has been broadened. Because in the mosque is the crypt where the head of St John the Baptist was supposed to have been kept.

To find a Christian relic inside a Muslim mosque is, of course, something that is unusual. Certainly, it'll be a shock for Malaysians, but it is clear that it is the teaching of Islam that we must respect the religion of others. To them their religion, to us our religion.

The best of us are those who obey God but we are far too busy thinking of our own personal ambition, to use our religion as a means to justify the wrongs that we do.

Thank you very much for your views, I really appreciate them.

Q: Do you still believe in this conspiracy of Jews in the Asian financial crisis?

A: I will have to give a very comprehensive answer to that. There are not that many Jews, only about 30 million. But they want to control the world, it has nothing to do with their religion, it's their personal Zionist ambition to rule the world.

The answer lies in capturing the most powerful country in the world - the United States.

How was it done? They invented and propagated the idea of democracy. If you are democratic, they have a right to all the rights of a democracy. They can stand for election, they can campaign, you cannot have any more massacres as they used to have in Europe.

Secondly, they promote the idea of human rights, that they must be given the same rights as anybody else. So again, there cannot be any discrimination against Jews.

Now, having spread these ideas among all the people, the majority feel that it is wrong to discriminate against the Jews.

At one time, Harvard University will not accept Jews. At one time, Jews

were not allowed to participate in banking in America.

Through the spread of democracy and human rights, they can do all that. They can carry out banking, and they are very good in banking. From ancient times, they are the ones who collected the greatest amount of interest.

When they became equal, they went for institutions that have the most influence on society. They captured the media. The media in the West belongs to them, that includes the electronic media (TV) and Hollywood. It became a propaganda machine for them.

And then, having got the media, they go for politics. Today, the US Government, many of the members of Congress, are Jews. If they are not Jews, their staff members are Jews.

I appeared on the same platform as Mr Ashcroft in Davos, he was assisted by a young man whose name was Israel. Their staff are all Jews.

They come to Malaysia, and they have the same view.

So by controlling the Press and media, controlling the money through banking, and controlling now the Congress, they have become the power in the United States.

They may not be many, American political candidates are extreme candidates, but there are only six million Jews in America.

They can ensure that you win or lose, because they are united whilst the others are divided. In Malaysia, we have the same experience.

In a constituency with majority Muslim Malays, for example, and a minority made up of Chinese and Indians, the Muslims are actually divided. The Chinese and Indians will decide who will win, with their votes.

There are more Muslims than Jews in the US, but they are divided into 1,000 different groups. And they can never get together so they cannot play the same role as the Jews.

The biggest power in America now controls the world and economy. Their ideas about currency trading is that which resulted in the attack on Malaysia.

I said this, and of course, I was roundly criticised at that time. They said they want to make money, it's not because they are Jews. But whether they want to make money or not, the fact is that they are Jews and what they have done, benefit the Jews.

So that is the situation.

Q: You have written many books, and we read them here in Syria, in an Arabic translation. Do you intend to write a book on Malaysia's successful experience in line with Islamic teachings? Syria is one of the very first countries, to want to define terrorism and called for an international conference. But there was no approval for it. If they agree, it will give the people in the occupied territories the right to defend themselves, to differentiate between resistance and others.

A: I'm retiring in October, and after I retire, I would like to record some of my experiences in Malaysia and to assure the world that we do not do anything that is against the thinking of Islam.

It may appear that we are not following the teachings of Islam but we go back to the fundamental teachings of Islam, and we get our guidance from there.

For example, there is a move in Malaysia to apply the hudud law. But these people do not have an idea of justice on how the trial is going to be conducted.

Even if the trial is unjust, they say because the method of the trial is correct, it is Islamic. And the Quran says that we are to judge with justice.

They say it doesn't matter if there is no justice. They say, for example, if a woman is raped and she complains that she has been raped by

so and so, and if she cannot produce witnesses, she must be telling a lie and punished with 80 strokes.

If later she is found to be pregnant, it is evidence that she has committed zina.

On the other hand, the person who raped her has to get off scot-free because there are no witnesses.

Is this Islamic - to punish the victim while the perpetrator goes free? We don't think that it is Islamic at all.

So, we may not appear to be implementing the hudud law but we are adhering to the teachings of Islam. When we do things in Malaysia, we refer to the teachings of Islam. In administration or application of the law, we follow the teachings of Islam.

With regard to terrorism, actually we had already convened a world conference to determine the definition of terrorism.

We know that many people are fighting for the independence of their country, and in the course of the fighting, they may do things that appear to be acts of terror.

But, in fact, there is no way out for them. That is the only way they can fight because they are less well-armed than their enemies.

We do not want the independence fighters to be called terrorists. But we have to accept the fact that certain acts like killing civilians who have nothing to do with their fight, are acts of terror but there are mitigating circumstances.

The Israeli Government can avoid committing acts of terror because they have the means, they don't have to carry out acts of terror.

The Palestinians, they have no aeroplanes, no tanks, no nothing; the only way they can fight back is the way they fight back. They may carry out suicide bombings.

If they act against civilians and not soldiers, it is still acts of terror but it is mitigated; it is because they have no choice. If they have a choice, I'm sure they would not do this.

But the Israeli Government has a choice, the Americans have a choice not to terrorise people by bombing civilians, hospitals etc.

But they do that, so that is an act of terror that cannot be excused.

We cannot hit at people because we are angry and frustrated. We are angry and very frustrated now, people are oppressing us but we cannot do anything against them.

But merely to kill people who are innocent because of our anger is not right. At least to me, I don't think it is right.

To kill people, not even the person who hit us, it is wrong.

We must admit that it is wrong. And we should avoid it if we can. If we have other means, we should resort to other means.

Malaysia had this conference which tried to define terrorism; unfortunately, we couldn't reach an agreement.