

17/10/2003

Pause and think

"IF we are to recover our dignity and that of Islam, our religion, it is we who must decide, it is we who must act," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in a forceful and unusually eloquent statement at the opening of the 10th OIC Summit yesterday. But will Muslims acknowledge this? Will those listening to his speech, delivered with the utmost candour, recognise that they do have the power to change their lot?

The sad and pathetic circumstances that have befallen the ummah suggest that Muslims, by and large, wilfully push aside the voice of reason. That so many act in the blind heat of anger, without planning and strategising, suggests that there is no attempt to stop and think. When things go wrong as they can, when planning is absent, blame is apportioned elsewhere, on external foes. There is no genuine endeavour to reflect on one's own weaknesses.

Perhaps, Muslims have been so accustomed to carrying the burden of victimhood that they are blinded to their own faults and the harsh realities of the time and usually claim it is God's will. The damage that this has done to the psyche of the ummah is worrying. As the Prime Minister said, some Muslims believe that poverty is Islamic, that suffering and being oppressed are also Islamic.

There are also Muslims who insist that this world is not theirs, that they can only look forward to the joys of heaven in the afterlife. To attain this, they must perform certain rituals, wear certain garments and put up a certain appearance. Whatever it is, they are taught to accept the fate that befalls them.

Another self-destructive belief, on the part of some, is that only their version of Islam is right, that only they are the true believers of the religion. There are now 1,000 versions of Islam whereas there should only be one. As the Prime Minister rightly pointed out, the detractors and enemies of Islam do not care whether Muslims are true believers or not. "To them, we are all Muslims, followers of a religion and a Prophet who they declare promotes terrorism, and we are all their sworn enemies. They will attack and kill us."

So determined have the Muslims become in their versions of what is right and wrong that they ignore the Quranic and the Prophet's injunctions to unite and be brothers. Because of the disunity, disarray and constant bickering, Muslims are treated with contempt and dishonour, the religion is denigrated, holy places are desecrated, Muslim countries are occupied and their people starved and killed.

Look at Palestine, Dr Mahathir said. After 55 years of fighting, nothing has been achieved. "We have in fact worsened our situation."

Twice he quoted a verse from the Quran stating that God will not change the fate of a community until the community has tried to change its fate itself.

His speech, read out to the first gathering of Muslim heads of Government and leaders since Sept 11, painted a panorama of desolation. But he also offered many paths for Muslims to consider and to act upon if they are serious.

For instance, he implored Muslims to study how the Prophet himself prepared for battle. "Surely the 23-year struggle of the Prophet can provide us with some guidance as to what we can and should do," he said.

It is hoped that Dr Mahathir's message will not end up lost or hidden in

a fog of timid, politically correct waffle, to be repeated but not acted upon in the years to come. Because Muslims must act. And the time is now. Now.