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that we can make for the sad fate of the Muslims is that they are not practising the true teachings of Islam, that the Islam that they now practise is wrongly interpreted.'

Dr Mahathir's impassioned plea to the Muslims to catch up with the West makes sense, in which education would be the central plank, focusing on such subjects that he specified as 'science, mathematics, engineering.' Muslim leaders with vision and will need to revamp their priorities so that backwardness, illiteracy and ignorance are buried.

Iraq has shown the loss of Anglo-American credibility since they chose to invade Iraq on a false pretext misleading not just their people but also the world at large. If future Iraqs are to be prevented, then the Muslim World must act in a new global coalition with Europe, China and public opinion in the US to provide an alternative vision based on the rule of law, rather than allowing the world to revert to the law of the jungle.

Interestingly, this duality apart, issues that are explosive and unresolved in the Muslim World occasionally find resonance even in the United States. A couple of recent ones are noteworthy. For instance, had word leaked out that a major speech of the Prime Minister of Pakistan was 'cleared' by the ISI, all hell would have broken loose in Pakistan and the Prime Minister would have been pilloried by his political opponents as a 'puppet of the Establishment.'

In the world's most developed democracy, the President admits his most significant speech of the year was vetted and 'cleared' by the CIA. Instead of embarrassment, there was criticism not about an intelligence agency's having virtual veto power over the contents of an address by the self-styled 'world's most powerful President' but that the CIA knowingly allowed a falsehood to be inserted in such a speech.

It is a manifestation of American chutzpah or bravado that misleading a nation can be state policy in such democracies, which pride themselves on their principles of transparency and accountability through elected institutions.

Or the issue of civil-military relations in the US, where 'civilian supremacy' was asserted by Defence Secretary Rumsfeld when he took the unusual step, unprecedented in the last half century, of bringing a general back from retirement to be the Chief of Army Staff. The same Truman diary has the American President, in 1947, telling his COAS, General Eisenhower, that the 'boss' (the President) wouldn't mind serving under his subordinate (the Army Chief) as his Vice President should the COAS seek the Presidency. Ironically, as President Truman's Diary shows, America's elected Chief Executive is encouraging, even inciting, his Army Chief to engage in partisan politics!

The important lesson to be derived is that we live in an 'anything goes' world where principles of truth, democracy and legality have taken a back seat while the powerful seek to reorder the rest through sheer military, political, economic might and technological knowhow.

The road to Muslim reassertion, as Mahathir rightly points out, lies in acquisition of modern education and knowledge, a route long discarded by self-serving Muslim elites too busy acquiring power and wealth for themselves. That remains the principal reason for Muslim weakness and backwardness.

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