

How Islamic are we?

IN HIS HAJ SERMON THIS year, the *imam* of Kaaba highlighted the benevolence of Islamic faith. While condemning the enemies of Islam for their nefarious designs, he counselled Muslims to seriously learn about their faith. As ignorance mars Muslim society, the faithful are driven to observe religious rituals superficially without reflecting on their spiritual significance. No wonder, they are a people in intellectual and spiritual decline who remain insecure at home and under threat from foreign adventurers. The *imam* also advocated moderation which is the essence of our religion.

The Muslims of the world stand in a house divided. Coupled with cultural aberrations their lack of understanding makes their commitment to the religion, generally, a matter of expediency.

In Pakistan, we are witnessing a strange kind of 'bad faith'. Its undesirable results are clearly visible: A dangerous divide threatens the state; the constitution is observed more in breach than in adherence. We are always creating issues that risk not only our progress but also the integrity of the federation.

Some groups are pursuing their interests with a total disregard for the national interest. Rules of law appear to be a mirage. The prevalence of the doctrine of necessity appears an affront to all that is desired by Muslims. The political scene remains hostage to policies which cannot be reconciled with General Pervez Musharraf's 'Pakistan-First' slogan. The country appears to be drifting towards the edge of the precipice.

Islam spurns soliciting for power. Also, the use of military force for maintaining power is considered most undesirable. Essentially, Islam stands for a system wherein those exercising power are held accountable to the people. Caliphs Omar and Ali fell to attacks by assassins but did not order personal security at public expense. This contrasts sharply with the exaggerated security arrangements for our general.

Fear also alienates a ruler from his people, making him vulnerable to palace intrigues. In an Islamic system, the leader has to be accessible and accountable to the peo-

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ple. This is also the essence of democracy. Caliph Omar's saying that he considered himself responsible for even a dog dying of hunger should be an eye-opener for Muslims. Caliph Ali is reported to have cut down his own allowance to promote austerity.

In Islamic governance, decision-making has to be subject to *adl* and *ehsan*. The former means comprehensive justice and the latter virtue. A society subject to such egalitarian administration establishes and protects civil rights, moral values and the supremacy of law. The people control all executive institutions and nobody is above the law, which is to be applied without discrimination. Unfortunately, our history is full of tyrannical aberrations.

Islam abhors the killing of even one human being, except in self-defence. But we see wanton destruction of life prompted by religious schism, greed for power and pelf. The poor are being driven to suicide while our public funds are ill spent. Having given up hope of securing employment at home, many Pakistanis die every year in trying to reach foreign lands. Those running human trafficking rings are said to have strong connections within the government. Despite some macro-

economic success, development appears to be lopsided as almost 90 percent of the people are groaning under the burden of mounting inflation. What to talk of Islamic governance, even democracies tend to provide social support to low-income sections of society. In our case, they are surrendered to harsh living conditions even as the government claims to have an egalitarian ethos.

As a people we appear to be giving Islam a bad name. There may still be a chance for Pakistan but its people must acquire knowledge and organise themselves to fight for the rule of law. They must also develop tolerance and *ehsan* as enjoined by Allah. At the political level, a grand reconciliation between the opposition and the government is needed.

Being the only nuclear power in the Muslim world, it is our duty to give a good account of ourselves.

The writer is a former secretary of the Interior Ministry