

BURNING OF THE QURAN

NATO had apologized on behalf its forces for the 'brave' act of burning the Holy Book of the Muslims. This very act raises a number of questions.

Why are these soldiers in this part of the world? Didn't they come to Afghanistan in order to help the Afghan people? Didn't they know that these people venerate their holy book? Weren't they aware of the riots and protests that took place after a Swedish cartoonist depicted their prophet in an unacceptable way? Didn't those protests take place under the very nose of these soldiers? NATO forces cannot come from far away

Afghanistan on the part of these ordinary soldiers. But those in command, those leading them, cannot plead ignorance on that count. They ought to have done their homework well before embarking on this type of mission. Did they not discover that these people area all Muslims, who respect their prophet and would not tolerate any action or even an utterance that denigrates their leader.

Or are these people still following their ancestors, who once upon a time went to countries in the East with the Bible (and often with the sword in the other) in order to show them the path to their deliverance. One is reminded of the Christian priest who made the observation about Australian Aborigines, that they were not fit to be considered among humans. One has to remind these people that such nonsense is no longer tolerated anywhere in the civilized world.

Or coming back to more modern times, don't these leaders of modern democracies remember the Fatva imposed on Salman Rushdee by the Ayatolla of Iran. If they do, there is no excuse for them to be allowing their fighters for democracy to be conducting themselves in this childish fashion. Not that these people do not know. The problem gets worse when one considers a very basic fact even a child could have understood by now, which is that all the countries where these foreign soldiers are operating in, are not at all happy with the situation; they are only tolerating the presence of alien armies in their sovereign land because nothing can be done against these super powers. People in these lands are of course not that docile

and tolerant, expressing their anger and disapproval at every turn. The big powers ought to have realized by now, that they are unwelcome guests in these lands.

It is a pity that some home truths cannot be easily driven home to some people who have

one hand, it is a case of understanding the place and its people. On the other hand, it is a case of driving into the heads of these soldiers some sanity, so that they come down to earth and accept the fact that no welcome-mat would be spread before



Africa or Asia.

Along with America, the soldiers from NATO countries are supposed to be on a mission, which is the noble task of ushering in democracy to these backward people. Otherwise, outsiders need not step in order to put the Afghan house in order. Afghanistan is suffering from the curse of Al Qaeda, which was responsible for the 9/11 attack. Let us not remind the US about their role in fostering the Al Qaeda led by their one-time collaborator bin Laden. These are things better forgotten in the interest of harmony and mutual respect. A teacher or coach trying to uplift the capacity of a pupil ought to have an initial assessment of the ability and knowledge of the prospective pupil. One can understand the lack of an appreciation of the conditions in



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an image problem in the sense that they think they are the custodians of all small countries and the poor inhabitants therein. This is not something welcome or even tolerated by the people concerned. There is another very important factor these big shots either ignore or simply do not grasp, which is that even people considered to be insignificant by some self-appointed judges, have their own assessment of themselves and are extremely proud of their identity and worth.

If the Western world did not notice this in a country like Iraq, they should not be forgiven. Did the invaders of Iraq realize that they were going to the 'cradle of civilization' for 'the noble task' of civilizing its inhabitants? None of the soldiers would have been briefed on the subject, for the decision-makers themselves perhaps would not have known that. Even after the hue and cry about the plundering of invaluable treasures kept in the Baghdad museum some these people did not bother to find out about the land in which they were bombing and killing innocents. At least the few who succeeded in getting away with their spoils may be happy and grateful for the opportunity given by the invasion.

How many of the leaders including George W. Bush are aware of the loss to that ancient land because of this civilizing operation? This is apart from the loss of human lives numbering some 160,000 according to the latest calculations. I wonder whether any of the leaders at any time think of the resentment created in the minds of the proud Iraqi people with this type of activities carried on by the invading armies? Do they even now realize that they were never welcome in that land by the people of the country? The spate of bombings and killings that was seen in Iraq after the defeat of Saddam Hussein was no accident, but deliberate attempts by the local population to drive home the message to the invaders that they were not welcome in the country. This was another clear message that was not understood by the invaders.

The silly act of burning the Quran has to be viewed against this background. While the leaders failed to read the writing on the wall, they also failed to tell their operators on the ground what was expected of them, and how they ought to conduct themselves in that foreign land. This has two aspects to it. On the

them. Not only the physical aspects of the country ought to have been explained to them, the composition of the population had to be given in detail. One would recall that the ethnic diversity of the Iraqi people had not been properly understood by the invaders, a factor that led to so many disputes and disagreements among the people and their leaders failing to agree on various things once a government was formed after liberation. The tribal composition of the population was something these saviors never properly understood. Then there was the question of the national pride and feelings that were not appreciated by them. It is not a case of assessing the value or the propriety of a custom or a practice, but to accept it as something held in high esteem by those used to them. Such things cannot be degraded or devalued by outsiders according to their standards, but have to be accepted as they are. This perhaps was the biggest problem these people faced and failed to come to grips with.

In the life of a Muslim, religion is something that has no separate existence, it is playing a part in every stage and aspect of a Muslim's life. This again is something most Westerners fail to understand. Not only has it to be understood as it is, it has to be respected without trying to judge according one's own experience and value systems. This was the message that Mahinda Rajapakse, President of Sri Lanka, tried to give the Western leaders in addressing the World Body. Has it been understood? Apparently no, because none of the utterances or actions of the leaders so far has given any indication that they are paying the least attention to his words. He was not passing on one of his discoveries. He was only quoting the best authority on the subjects of tolerance, love and compassion that the world has seen. These are basic requirements or qualities that have to be in the possession of anyone trying to bring about peace and sanity to any place or group.

Rajapakse quoted the Buddha's words

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