

Why Afkar?

"Afkar will relate events to ideas and present ideas that, hopefully, will be eventful..."

Some fifty years ago, Muhammad Iqbal, the poet philosopher of the East, passionately expressed his longings for the resurgence of Islam in the throbbing, stirring verses of Javid Nama. Despite his unusual gift, however, the tribulations of the *Umma* often make the poet mute and nothing but forlorn cries issue from his lips. In a rare mood of despair, for instance, Iqbal begs God:

*The date tree of my thought despairs of leaf and fruit;
Either despatch the axe, or the breeze of dawn.*

Finding no solace in reason alone, his plaint and supplication continue and express the anguish of the Muslim soul which finds the secularism and self-defeating rationalism of the modern world so out of tune with his own conviction of the unity of knowledge and values, of thought and deed, of reason and revelation:

*Knowledge takes up residence in the thought
Love's lodge is the unsleeping heart
So long as knowledge has no portion of love
It is a mere picture gallery of thoughts*

.....
*Without revelation no wise man ever found the way,
He died buffeted by his own imaginings;
Without revelation life is a moral sickness,
Reason is banishment, religion constraint.*

The Muslim world since the time of Iqbal, no one will dispute, has come a long way. Not only is the *Umma*, after many a century of humiliation and deprivation, experiencing anew the taste of power, the virility of its *mujahids*, in Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon and elsewhere, it has also demonstrated that Islam, as universal faith and global polity, is destined to play an ever more prominent role in the world of tomorrow. The sense of power and heedless euphoria, however, can be elusive and self-defeating. A reflecting Muslim sees nothing but hardships and struggles ahead. The bouyancy, dynamism and *Jihad* can only be sustained through inquiry, contemplation and *Ijtihad*.

Fikr and *Tafakkur*, thought and reflection, are central to the Qur'anic prescription for the ills of man and society. God admonishes man to ponder, meditate and reflect upon His creation (10:24, 13:3, 16:11 etc.), His revelation (16:44, 59:21), His bounties (30:20, 45:12), the veracity of His Messenger (6:50) or the mysteries of man's own soul (7:176, 39:42). The Noble Prophet too has exhorted his followers to meditate and reflect because "an hour of

service is better than sixty years' service." Moral judgement and the urge to action, Islam unconditionally insists, must as much be steeped in meditation and deliberation as it is mandatory to have them rooted in the divine revelation. God's command and man's reflection of his own situation are not discordant, for ultimately reason and revelation are complementary, not contradictory, in Islam.

Afkar, the international magazine for events and ideas, makes its debut at this critical juncture of Muslim history when the need to follow the Qur'anic injunction on *Tafakkur* is more urgent than ever. *Afkar* will relate events to ideas and present ideas that, hopefully, will be eventful; for it believes that actions that effect us must be reflected upon and ideas that move us must lead to action. In short, the harmony of action and contemplation that is the Islamic ideal is the motto of *Afkar*.

Afkar will mirror the world as a whole through its relationship to *Dar-al-Islam* and the Muslim *Umma* will be special and intimate. *Afkar* is uncompromisingly universal in its aspirations but it is solely through its unnegotiable Islamic commitment that it intends to move towards that goal. It will report and deliberate upon events and ideas coming from that world that encircles and encapsulates the *Umma*, but will also provide vigorous and gratifying critique of everything extraneous from a vantage point that is truly Islamic. The materially, ideationally powerful outer world, that bullies and harms the House of Islam but also challenges and stimulates it, must be responded to, it must be reiterated, in a spirit that is both defiant and accomodating. Militancy and reflection, *Jihad* and *Ijtihad*, both need to be cultivated as the Islamic response to the challenges of modernism and secularism. By ventilating ideas and thought that are both embryonic and mature, probing and certain, diffident and confident, Islamisable and Islamic, *Afkar* will also act as a window of the Muslim soul to those who watch the *Umma* from the outside. To those inside the House of Islam, especially its youth, *Afkar* can only repeat what Iqbal said at the end of his prayer in Javid Nama:

*I, who despair of the great sages of the old,
Have a word to say touching the day to come
Render my speech easy unto the young,
Make my abyss for them attainable.*

Afkar is a magazine for the future; it reflects on the day to come.