

# Fresh impetus against

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MALAYSIA'S focus on apartheid in South Africa at next week's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is reflective of the strong feelings it has had for the issue in the past three decades.

To be sure, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad will give this concern the fresh impetus it needs when he mingles with other heads of Government in the Bahamas. Tunku Abdul Rahman and the late Tun Abdul Razak had taken up the cudgel initially.

At the London CHOGM in 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman, along with the Premiers of India, Ceylon, Australia, Pakistan,

Nigeria, New Zealand and Canada, questioned the wisdom of allowing South Africa to remain a member of the Commonwealth.

South Africa's continued presence in the grouping was tantamount to "approval or at least, acquiescence" of Pretoria's racial policy — which was against the grain of Commonwealth principles.

In his strong statement calling for the expulsion of South Africa, Tunku Abdul Rahman said the Commonwealth was a "unique institution" bringing together countries which comprise a

## Special Report By SHARIFAH ROZITA

quarter of the world's population. And it was vital therefore that its principles be declared as they were founded on respect for human rights.

The Government-imposed political, social and educational segregation in South Africa based on race was totally unacceptable, he said. Pointing out that South Africa had not assisted other Commonwealth countries and only wished to remain in the association because of the material advantages such a membership accorded her, Tunku Abdul Rahman asked if "her continued membership did not offend the whole

moral basis of the Commonwealth."

In the late 1950s and especially in May 1961, when South Africa was on the verge of becoming a republic, the apartheid system devised by Pretoria had already become a major international controversy. Tunku Abdul Rahman, along with fellow Commonwealth leaders, could not accept any hint of the grouping's condoning of the racial policies.

Indeed, at the London CHOGM, there was an ever increasing need for the meeting to adopt a firm line of action because it was felt that the attitudes of the people of the world, especially former British colonies, would somehow be influenced by its outcome.

The expulsion of South Africa followed.

However, the termination of Pretoria's membership in the Commonwealth did not in any way diminish Malaysia's concern over its apartheid policies. If anything, Pretoria seemed to have become even bolder in consolidating its apartheid regime.

Historical and economic ties between Pretoria and a few western developed countries were helping to cushion South Africa's isolation from the international community. It was the knowledge that it still had such ties with the "nations that count" that guaranteed its continued survival.

Malaysia's continued concern was again aired

in the strong response by the late Tun Abdul Razak at the CHOGM in Singapore in 1971 to a planned arms sale by Britain to South Africa.

South Africa, he said, continued its occupation of South-West Africa in defiance of the United Nations resolution calling for her withdrawal. In fact, the strength of the regime had multiplied with the support that her comrade-in-arms, Rhodesia, was reciprocating. The half-baked measures taken by some of the western developed nations in pressuring Pretoria to dismantle its apartheid system only served to embolden it.

Tun Razak expressed his stand that "a change of heart by the South African authorities is

only possible when they are convinced of their isolation, particularly from their western friends. Events have shown that contacts with South Africa have done nothing so far to make her ameliorate, let alone abandon her policies."

He echoed what was already a known diplomatic lore: that in the final analysis, South Africa could still count on the assistance of its western friends.

Labelling apartheid an "unmitigated evil", Tun Razak spearheaded the pressure from among fellow Commonwealth members to get London to abandon its proposed arms sales. It did.

Such has been the history of Malaysia's interest in and efforts against

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Dr Mahathir, as Wisma Putra sources indicate, is unlikely to "singlehandedly" change the situation in South Africa. Indeed, he is not arriving at the Bahamas meeting next week armed with a programme of action that the rest of the Commonwealth countries would see as the means with which to pound apartheid into the ground.

Some observers are also inclined to wonder at the attention that Malaysia seems to be according to a country and a system so far removed from its shores — and with whom it has virtually no contact except at international forums. Nevertheless, as the diplomatic circle points out, this

does not mean that such attention is unwarranted.

The whole issue of apartheid, after all, is about human rights and respect for the dignity of man. And the current developments in South Africa have increased world attention on a regime that has robbed the 18 million blacks of their rights in their own home.

There has been violence. More than 600 lives have been lost in the past year. Prime Minister Botha has not given any hints of serious efforts to dismantle apartheid, apart from cosmetic changes which have been shown up for what they really are.

## Push

Amidst all these, the sanctions and pressure from South Africa's western friends have thus far also had no real effect. Britain has refused to get on the bandwagon of sanctions and the United States has chosen to impose only "selective" ones. The actions of a few others have also failed to hit South Africa where it hurts most.

As far as the Commonwealth is concerned, Britain is the single most important channel through which real pressure could be exerted on Pretoria. British companies make up 30 per cent of total foreign investment in South Africa, a figure that underlines the mutual benefits accrued.

Nevertheless, Wisma Putra sources said, Malaysia was convinced that Britain should be influenced to impose greater pressure on the South African regime. And this is the main thrust, politically, of Dr Mahathir's participation in the CHOGM this time. There is a need for words to be spoken as they should be and a spade to be called a spade. Dr Mahathir's standing in the international community could assure him of the audience that his views should have.

He is not expected to add another voice to the official proclamations for sanctions and denunciation of western na-

tions friendly with Pretoria. What he is expected to do, during the executive sessions — forums which accord close direct discussions between heads of Government — is to maximise the influence that Commonwealth members can bring to bear on Britain and the other nations with economic and social ties with South Africa. He will try for a serious push to get the "change of heart" in the South African Government that Tun Razak had aimed for.

Malaysia rejects the notion that sanctions against South Africa would hurt the black population more — in line with the stance of the black leaders that such sanctions could not hurt them any more than continued apartheid would.

Indeed, the eradication of apartheid from within South Africa itself would require nothing short of a revolution. But revolutions bring with them several unsavoury consequences, including the destabilisation of the southern tip of the African continent, which pose strategic problems and possible escalation of superpower rivalry.

What South Africa has not done in the past 200 years — to end its deliberate, almost religious discrimination against her black population and place her citizens on equal terms — it is hardly likely to do following the CHOGM in the Bahamas.

And what several world leaders have not too successfully done in pressurising Pretoria to change is unlikely to be achieved by one attendance of the heads of Government meeting by Dr Mahathir.

But, as Wisma Putra points out, the forum to speak out and to act behind the scenes is being provided at the Bahamas meeting. This is the opportunity that Dr Mahathir is expected to seize.

The extra mileage in furthering the anti-apartheid cause will be welcomed by all those who abhor racism.