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## Building a solid fraternity

LACK of action has been the hallmark of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. However, there is hope that the Teheran summit will yield a different outcome: That members will have enough gumption to revive the jaded entity by providing an agenda of holistic action to prepare the ummah for the challenges of a globalised world. But first, they must recognise the futility of treating the occasion as a congenial chit-chat session punctuated with rousing rhetorical admonitions of the West.

Such recognition has stirred many members. That the summit is well-attended, certainly vastly different from the recent Fourth Middle-East North Africa Economic Conference which was once touted as the economic underpinning of Arab-Israeli peace, indicates that this time around members may give the organisation a new lease of life. Although forging unity has long been a theme in previous summits, it has failed to translate into a single solid fraternity. But recent developments such as the speculative attacks on the currencies of Indonesia and Malaysia, would have likely made members view unity in a broader context: The consolidation of ummah unity into a single entity and its potential in addressing economic injustice in the international financial market.

As pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, it is indeed imperative that Muslim countries accept the challenges of globalisation and adapt themselves to preserve their faith and identity. Indeed, conquering the changes that's rapidly taking place around us is the only means to guarantee our survival. No gains will be made by retreating. The acquisition of knowledge is, after all, the cornerstone of Islam. What's urgently required from the Islamic world today is the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will contribute to the greatness of Islam.

Unfortunately, the mentality of rejecting worldly life for the hereafter is far from vanquished. Substance is substituted with pettiness; the significance of ibadah (worship) is almost eclipsed by form and ritual. The quibbling over small and petty things and over minor differences in the expression of the faith seems to dominate the intellectual discourse among Muslims.

As lamented by Dr Mahathir, "We are forever trying to outdo each other in various external manifestations of religious piety, in inventing a new world and more restrictive practices in our desire to exhibit the strength of our faith."

Frustrations at OIC's lethargy in addressing crucial issues confronting the ummah are understandable. It held together some of the political aspirations of some Muslim countries and sadly, that's as far as it has gone. Any desire to take OIC beyond its present role should not be a mere interlude. In the modern world, security and economic strength are inextricable. Advancement in economy, education and technology are areas that should have been championed by the OIC.

The potential is there. With potential reserves of US\$1.24 trillion (about RM4.5 trillion) and a volume of US\$72 billion, the Islamic world would have had more impact on the global trade and economy. But Muslim statesmen seem to lack the will to initiate a cohesive strategy to go further than before in the search for Islamic unity and prosperity. Will they be able to seize the opportunity in Teheran?

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