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Learning a lesson from two Malaysians at the G15 Summit

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OSAMA and Sherbini are two very patient young men. I met them while in Cairo last week covering the G15 Summit, which was held for the 10th time. This was also the second time Egypt had hosted the summit, the first being two years ago.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad led the Malaysian delegation, which also comprise Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

The Prime Minister has the distinction of having attended all the summits, which is a reflection of his commitment to the cause of South-South cooperation.

Osama and Sherbini are two Malaysians attached to the Malaysian Embassy in the Egyptian capital. I met them briefly last year but got to know them better during these last few days.

Both demonstrated a great deal of willingness to carry out their tasks and did so without showing any impatience.

Osama's father was a Malaysian who died a few years ago. The lad was in Kuala Lumpur then but chose to return to Egypt to look after his mother.

Osama is married to a graduate of the International Islamic University. Last year, he worked for Malaysia Airlines but has since joined the embassy.

Sherbini is a graduate of the prestigious Al-Azhar University. He married an Egyptian and they moved to Malaysia some time ago. However, he returned to Egypt to help his wife look after her family.

Sherbini applied for a job at the embassy on hearing there was a vacancy. He has lived in Egypt for 18 years.

I marvel at the stamina of both men, especially when dealing with the irritants at the Summit. Even though Egypt has hosted the Summit before, its bureaucracy appears to be still on the learning curve. There were numerous changes to all sorts of arrangements before and even during the Summit, and both men were often called to help sort out these annoyances.

Their fluent Arabic was a big help, and they were always available to lend a hand. Osama particularly knows the Egyptian routine quite well and was not at all flustered when confronted with new problems. These 'problems' were not problems really, but changes made throughout the day that forced others to juggle their schedules and related logistical arrangements.

Sherbini handled the transport requirements of the officials very well while Osama was very helpful with Immigration clearance and other needs.

I'm convinced that if others were entrusted with the tasks handled by the two gentlemen, they would have broken down, if not physically, then mentally.

On one occasion, while waiting for Dr Mahathir's arrival at the Cairo airport (the security was so tight then even senior Malaysian police officers were barred from entering), there were changes to transport requirements.

Sherbini, minus coat and tie (the temperature touched 40 Degrees Celsius in the afternoon), was made to run to and fro to accommodate the changes.

Most people would have kicked up a row when faced with such a situation, but not Sherbini. Keeping his cool always, the young man did his job in exemplary fashion.

Osama, on the other hand, was trying to explain matters to those of us

who were refused entry to the airport.

He did that well too, mindful always that the policemen on duty would not take too kindly if fingers were pointed at them.

I've covered quite a number of conferences such as this, but the security arrangements of this one would be hard to beat. Some of us were given three separate passes, but even these did not guarantee access readily. In the end, some of us relied on our own arrangements and this helped us considerably.

But the Indian Press had the best arrangements. Since the media centre was not at the same location as the Summit, and the access given by the various types of passes was not always forthcoming, the sizeable Indian media delegation had their own Press centre, with full support facilities.

This was really good. Any member of the media who wanted to get copies of speeches of the Indian head of delegation could get them without any hassle. India, many of us reckoned, was very committed to the G15 too. Perhaps, others should show that same commitment too.

The Indian journalists had very good rapport with the officials from their country. In fact, they had the full support of the Indian Foreign Office in carrying out their work. This made the rest of us green with envy.

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