

15 JUNE 2000
Syed Hamid-ICFM
MALAYSIA BIDDING FOR A TOP POST IN OIC

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, June 15 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, which hosts the 27th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) here beginning June 27, is vying for the post of assistant secretary-general of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Kuala Lumpur was now seeking the support of OIC member states for ambassador Datuk Sallehuddin Abdullah to be named to the post.

He said at the same time, Malaysia would also be assessing several candidates for the OIC secretary-general's post which will fall vacant in 2001. The post, which is for a four-year period, is currently held by Prof Dr Azeddine Laraki of Morocco.

Malaysia's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, held the secretary-general's post from 1970-1973.

Speaking to Bernama in an interview here recently, Syed Hamid said Malaysia would support "a reform-minded candidate who is sensitive to the needs of member states as well as committed towards ensuring a more efficient and effective secretariat".

He also said to ensure fresh ideas and new blood in the OIC secretariat, Malaysia believed whatever possible, the OIC should avoid extending the tenure of the secretary-general and assistant secretary-general.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to open the ICFM on June 27. The four-day conference will also be attended by the OIC secretary-general.

About 1,000 delegates from OIC member countries will attend the meeting, the second hosted by Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur hosted the earlier meeting in 1974.

The OIC, formed in 1969, consists of 56 member countries and four observer states, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Central African Republic, Cote D'Ivoire and Thailand.

In the interview, Syed Hamid said Malaysia hoped to see "a leaner, more efficient and an effective organisation with a stringent administrative accountability".

"In short, we need to reform the nerve centre of the organisation, i.e. the secretariat," he said.

Syed Hamid said the OIC should seriously look towards merging some of the organs and affiliates of the grouping to reduce operating cost.

"The cost of maintaining these organs and institutions is too high resulting in some members not being able to pay their contributions to the organisation," he said.

He noted that the high cost, at times, was also due to imprudent spending.

"If we were to find that the functions of some of the institutions are either redundant or irrelevant, as responsible member states, we should not hesitate to wind up," said Syed Hamid.

The minister said OIC member states had initiated and begun to undertake the task of reforming the grouping "in order to regain OIC's credibility".

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was ready to undertake a leading role to revitalise the OIC "if there is support and strong political commitment among member states towards this noble objective".

"However, at the moment, Malaysia detects no sense of urgency among members to do so," he said.

He said that at the 26th ICFM in Burkina Faso, Malaysia was the only country calling for the reform and reinventing of the OIC.

"As a founding member, Malaysia has always been vocal in voicing out the need to reform the OIC so as to remain effective and relevant to safeguard the interests of the ummah," he said.

Asked what would Malaysia highlight at the ICFM here, Syed Hamid said Kuala Lumpur would push for the creation of a new international financial architecture (IFA) and the strengthening of the Multilateral Trading system.

He said Malaysia had proposed this at two preparatory meetings of the OIC senior officials in Jeddah.

On political matters, Malaysia would raise the issues of Chechnya, Kosovo, humanitarian intervention and E-Sovereignty, he said.

On "Islam and Globalisation" as the theme of the ICFM, Syed Hamid said it was imperative for the ICFM to create an awareness among Muslim member states on the impact of the globalisation process.

Asked to comment on the lack of unity among member states, he said each member state had its own guiding principles governing its policies and interests as a nation state.

As for Malaysia, it would continue to give constructive comments for the betterment of the ummah (community) consistent with one of the Hadith, that "Allah would not change one's destiny unless one is willing to do so".

"Whatever its shortcomings, we believe that the OIC still has an important role to play in protecting the ummah as well as finding solutions to the problems faced by the Muslim world.

"In this spirit, Malaysia will continue to give the OIC a fresh and renewed thrust, both in terms of approach and outlook," he added.

The full text of the interview with the foreign minister can be viewed at Bernama's website at www.bernama.com

-- BERNAMA

ES RM