

17/11/2000

Need to renew OIC's resolve

RIGHTLY so that the just ended summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) focused on the concern, impatience and anger of Muslim nations and Muslims everywhere with the plight of the Palestinians and their sufferings at the hands of heavily armed Israelis. But other issues which affect the welfare of the Islamic world in the longer term have also been rightfully highlighted. While it has long shared the indignation of other Muslim nations over the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, Malaysia is nevertheless playing an important role in steering the OIC to pay attention to other issues such as the reform of the OIC itself, globalisation, trade liberalisation and the impact of the information age. Our contribution and input in the efforts to uplift the world's Muslim community are obviously recognised by the 56-member OIC as the next and 10th OIC Summit in 2003 will be held in Malaysia.

It is about time that the OIC did something concrete about renewing its effectiveness and relevance for the sake of the Muslim countries of which none has attained developed nation status yet although some are oil-rich countries with enormous revenue. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, Muslim countries will lose in the process of globalisation if they remain as spectators and spurn efforts towards some kind of unity among them and warns that globalisation in the form it is taking now is a threat to the Muslims. Dr Mahathir also lamented that while others are uniting and consolidating their strength, "we are drifting apart and fragmenting." The Islamic world should respond in a planned and co-ordinated manner by embracing information technology and equipping Muslims with the ability to handle the challenges.

It is gratifying that among the proposals adopted by the summit is a Malaysian proposal that a consultant be engaged to find ways to reform the OIC so that it becomes more effective in protecting the interests of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims. The communique at the end of the summit also called for the formation of a coherent Islamic entity to face up to the international trade competition due to globalisation and to complete a study to set up an Islamic union of financial markets.

The Summit as expected strongly condemned the Israelis for their crimes against the Palestinians but it is a sad reflection of Arab weakness that 30 years after OIC's formation, Muslim nations are still watching in despair as their Palestinian brethren are being bullied and their land and rights trampled upon by the Israelis. It is recognised that the Palestinians' fight for freedom from Israeli occupation over the last half century is one issue which can easily arouse the emotions and passions of the Arabs and for the world's Muslims is a rallying point. As long as Israel occupies Palestinian land we can expect the Palestinian issue to be high on the agenda of an OIC Summit.

Arab disunity and the self-serving policies and actions of the West, particularly the US, in the Middle East have been often cited as contributing factors to the Arab nations' failure to defeat the Israelis in the last four Arab-Israeli wars and free the Palestinians from the Jewish state. However, more fundamental than the immediate need to confront the Israelis militarily is the longer term requirement for the Arabs - and the Muslim nations - to narrow the technological, scientific and economic gap with the developed nations.

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