

Threat from within,

STAR 16 OCT 2003

Marking his departure after 22 unprecedented years as the longest-serving elected leader in the world, numerous media interviews were sought with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. On the eve of the official opening of the 10th Summit Session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) today, *The Star* Associate Editor Bunn Nagara was invited for a one-on-one interview with Dr Mahathir on the OIC in his final, exclusive media interview as Prime Minister.

IN LAUNCHING Malaysia's incoming chairmanship of the OIC, this interview was beamed simultaneously to all 57 OIC member countries. (In Malaysia, this was shown as *Special Focus on the OIC* on RTM1 at 9pm last night.)

The following is the full transcript of the interview, covering key areas of OIC concern including unity among members, trade and the international currency of trade, the image of Islam and terrorism, threats to the Muslim *ummah* and oil as a defensive weapon, the promotion of science and technology, and Dr Mahathir's own experience in administering Malaysia which could apply to and benefit the OIC.

How serious do you see the threats today to the OIC as a cohesive and effective voice of the Muslim world, and what are some of these main threats and challenges?

The threat is not directed at the OIC but is directed at Muslim people in the world. The OIC has still the capacity to act.

The problem, of course, is that the OIC has not got the will to act. That is, the threat actually is within – not coming from outside.

The lack of effectiveness of the OIC is widely seen as due to the lack of unity among member countries. How would Malaysia's chairmanship of the OIC seek to overcome the differences to help forge unity?

I don't think we should aim for total unity of 1.3 billion Muslims in 57 different countries. That is not achievable.

But if we can achieve unity of a significant number – a small minority even, we can act and produce results.

Do you have any particular plan at the moment?

We have some ideas about how we can go about these things, but of course we need to have a few countries to subscribe to these plans and to act.



OIC leaders such as yourself have mentioned before the possibility of using oil as a weapon in defending the rights and interests of members like Palestine. Yet when Iraq announced doing that in April last year, it was attacked 11 months later. How can defensive methods work without inviting further attacks in response?

There are judicious and prudent ways of using oil as a weapon. But that does not necessarily mean that we should cut back on the production of oil, deprive the world of oil.

We have to think, if you have a weapon – you can use it many ways. So, we have to think of other ways rather than just merely cutting back on the production, depriving the world of its supply.

In recent years, Islamic extremism has grabbed world attention and associated Islam with political violence. What should OIC members and other countries do to dispel this negative image?

In the first place, we should make an assessment as to the results of terrorism.

We should step back, we should think and find ways of doing things which are more effective than merely

retaliating, merely expressing our anger and bitterness and just killing people because they kill us.

The question of image has to do with media portrayal, especially in the international news, which seems to be dominated by western agencies. Is there a way for the OIC to counter that?

We should project ourselves in a different way. There are many ways of projecting yourself without just merely allowing people to make their own interpretation.

Of course, if you do things that are obviously wrong, then we get a bad press. On the other hand, there are ways of projecting our problems to the rest of the world which can win the sympathy of the rest of the world where we will not be accused of terrorism.

Three years ago, you found that the anger of some OIC member countries at Israeli aggression was such that some of them considered cutting ties with the United States, but nothing of the kind happened. Frankly, how do you see the future prospects of the Muslim *ummah*?