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Message strikes a chord

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ASKED how he felt now that Taiwan had the tallest building in the world, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said:

"They have one very tall building, taller than ours.

"But we have two. Ours have the distinction of being the tallest twin towers in the world. No one has tried that yet."

His reply raised a chuckle from those present at the Press conference where he said it. Sporting and dignified, it struck a chord.

The message: Take pride in your achievements and refuse to be treated as inferior.

That was essentially what Malaysia tried to inject into the 10th session of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit, which ended on Friday.

Those who have been to the Middle East and other Muslim nations would have noticed that technological advancement is lacking.

But step into Malaysia, at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, there is this aura of sophistication.

An interpreter from Senegal, who spent much time during the summit inside the Putrajaya Convention Centre in the day, tried to spend as much time outside at night.

"Look at how beautiful the view is from here. You guys must be very hardworking. Our problem is that we party too much.

"Do you know why the Senegal football team failed to continue its good run in the last World Cup?

"The night before the crucial quarter-final match against Turkey the players partied until the wee hours, and they lost the match," he said.

Similarly, from Burkina Faso, director of communications Sylvestre Some: "What can I say?

"I wish all Third World nations are like Malaysia."

Praise such as this could be interpreted as being skin deep, a mere assessment of the beauty of Putrajaya and other architectural wonders here.

But a Mauritanian with the OIC secretariat in Jeddah made this assessment:

"Muslims have only the past to gloat about. We talk about being centres for civilisation, modernity and knowledge. But where are these centres today?

"Iraq, the cradle of civilisation, is not only destroyed, it is now occupied by non-Muslim forces who have shown that they are hostile to Islam.

"To my mind, since we cannot even gloat about our past glories, I think what Malaysia has done is correct.

"It is now a part of contemporary civilisation, and the architectural wonders that I see give credence to it being the modern-day centre for Islamic glory."

There were Malaysians who viewed the summit as an exercise to further glorify Dr Mahathir.

But an aide to Dr Mahathir had this to say: "Let's be objective here.

"He is going to step down in two weeks. He does not have a house here (Putrajaya) and chances are, he may not even travel to this part of the country after he retires.

"Even if Putrajaya is part of the legacy he would be leaving behind, it

is something for the whole nation and future generations to share."

It is sad to see how political schisms here affect the plot of a bigger story.

There is no doubt that the success of the OIC Summit and Muslim leaders' endorsement of Malaysia's leadership will boost the image of the ruling coalition.

Critics have said the Government's intention to host the OIC Summit was to give Umno the Islamic credentials it badly needed for the next general election.

Said an Umno supporter: "Surely Muslims in Malaysia should not be too small to look at things in such perspective.

"Travel to any part of the Islamic world and mention you're from Malaysia, you can expect to hear them sing our praises.

"Muslims abroad will not ask if you are from Umno or Pas. As long as you are from Malaysia, they will see you as someone from a better nation."

This is not an exaggeration. Many Malaysian journalists who have travelled to Muslim countries or Third World nations say the same.

During a TV1 programme on the OIC, aired live, a caller told the panellists that Malaysia did not have the credibility to call for unity among member nations when Muslims in the country were divided by Umno and Pas.

The reply from panellist Prof Datuk Muhamad Abu Bakar of University of Malaya was enlightening:

"There is no way any nation can truly achieve total unity among its people. What we are expecting is the unity of purpose."

The presence of Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang and vice-president Datuk Mustafa Ali at the OIC Summit and the opening of the OIC Expo respectively lent credence to this point.

They were there on the invitation of the Government.

These Pas leaders may have differences of opinion with the BN Government, but there is no doubt that they (Pas leaders) are all concerned about the state of affairs in other Muslim nations.

They too have expressed consternation and condemned the killing of Palestinians and the attack on Syria by the Tel Aviv regime and also the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Those who sneered and said the OIC Summit was a forum to pay homage to Dr Mahathir missed the bigger picture, missed seeing that the mantle of leadership had fallen upon Malaysia to shepherd fellow Muslim nations to success.

Malaysia has shown that it is no pushover when it comes to dealing with the West.

This was pointed out by Prof Datuk Dr Abdul Rahman Embong of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

"Take the example of our Petronas," he said.

"It proceeded with its petroleum venture in Libya despite the threat of sanctions from the US.

"To me, that is how Muslim nations should behave. It is about standing up for our rights."

Malaysia believes that it has what it takes to reform the OIC and shake it out of its lethargy. But it must have the support of member nations, a point Dr Mahathir made in his opening speech.

He was practical enough to realise that it was impossible to unite all the 57 member nations.

But he believed, even with only one-third, the OIC would be a force to reckon with.

That established, the next course of action will then be dependent on how member nations respond to the 12-point action plan adopted at the

summit.

It is pragmatic and action-oriented, requiring commitment and conviction and not much resources.

The points, if pursued, will promote closer rapport among Muslim nations and increase intra-trade, which will serve to lift the members out of their impoverished state.

The summit also made a call which was a strong message to the rest of the world about the unity of purpose among members.

That was the call for an economic boycott of Israel.

But first things first.

Before the boycott can be effected, member nations that still have diplomatic ties with Israel should sever them, at least until Tel Aviv stops its aggression against the Palestinians.

All in all, the OIC Summit, despite its critics and the cynical remarks, did well to come up with a range of achievable goals.

If they can be realised, then economic prosperity will follow.

And then, contemporary cradles of civilisation can be built in Muslim nations.

The tallest twin towers in the world are just a sample.