

30/09/2003

## Bangladesh eyes OIC sec-gen post

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - A Bangladeshi may be the next secretary-general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference as it is the only country to date to propose its candidature for the post.

The new secretary-general is to be elected at the OIC summit to be held in Putrajaya from Oct 11 to 18.

Bangladeshi High Commissioner to Malaysia Masood Aziz said Bangladesh was confident of getting the post unopposed as no other country had shown interest.

"We announced our candidature because we want to be directly involved in the revitalisation of the OIC. We are more than happy to work with Malaysia in the process," he said. Malaysia will be chairman for the next three years.

The present chairman of the OIC is Qatar and the secretary-general is Morocco, represented by Abdelouahed Belkeziz.

In an interview here, Masood said because Malaysia had undergone astounding socio-economic development, many countries from the Third World and OIC looked to it as a role model "worth emulating".

"The expectations of these countries of Malaysia as the chairman of OIC are quite high. Malaysia is already the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, an organisation with 116 member countries," he said.

Malaysia has held the chair of NAM for seven months, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the chair spokesperson.

Speaking of Dr Mahathir's meeting with G8 leaders in Paris, France, last June, Masood said:

"NAM, under Malaysia's chairmanship, co-ordinated the viewpoints of the member countries on many important issues."

He said with such experiences, Malaysia as OIC chairman could alleviate the sufferings of the ummah. He said the OIC expected Malaysia to unify the ummah, consolidate the solidarity of member countries and ensure that the peace process in the Middle East remained on course.

"The OIC should ensure that the United Nations has an enlarged and appropriate role in the post-war reconstruction of Iraq.

"The OIC should also establish that Islam and Muslims are not equated with terrorism."

He said the OIC's expectations could be realised through dialogues with the European Union and Western countries as well as through the socio-economic development of Muslim countries.

Asked if the OIC should have played a bigger role in the Palestine and Iraq issues, he said the general expectation of Muslim countries was that the OIC should have done more to help both countries.

"In the bipolar context, many leading oil producing nations in the Gulf had some clout, some leverage to influence decision-making in Washington, albeit to a certain extent.

"That is not the case now.

"Even France, Russia, Germany and others could not dissuade the United States from bypassing the United Nations. Such is the preponderance of the US' military and economic might."

On the OIC's weaknesses, Masood said the secretariat lacked adequate authority and financial resources. It was, therefore, structurally weak as evident by its pessimism in the immediate aftermath of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks in the US.

He said more resources should be made available to the OIC secretariat and greater authority delegated to it.

He suggested that the OIC set up a media channel of its own, which could articulate the views of the member countries.

He also suggested that it raise a peace-keeping force for rapid deployment to any Muslim country to diffuse tension so as to pre-empt external interference.