

10/04/2003

Dr M can speak for Muslims

Roziana Hamsawi

PETALING JAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad can lead non-Arab Muslim countries in declaring their stand on events in Iraq.

Dr Mahathir has the international stature and recognition for his frankness in expressing his opinions, even on the policies of Western powers, said the director-general of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Pakistan, Dr Shireen A. Sheikh.

She said it was unfortunate that the Arab countries as a group could not speak strongly against the Iraq invasion because of pressure from, and their dependency on, the United States.

As such, non-Arab Muslim states must be forthright in their views, she said at a seminar on "Pakistan-Malaysia Relations: An Overview and Prospects for the Future", organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) here today.

The seminar was chaired by IDFR director-general Datuk Dr Mohd Yusof Ahmad.

"Unlike the Arabs, non-Arab Muslim countries need to be strong, forthright and absolutely unapologetic in making our voices heard.

"Hopefully, by being strong we can avoid another invasion by the US of another Muslim country," Shireen added.

She lamented the "lack of gratitude" of the US and its allies for efforts made by Muslim countries to counter transnational terrorism.

"The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting held here in April last year dwelt at length on the issue of terrorism and its definition.

"Despite this effort and the number of agreements signed among countries to combat this threat, the US did not appreciate this."

She added that the US still accused certain Muslim countries of harbouring terrorists.

"No acts of terrorism should be linked to any religion. Muslim countries must remain firm on that.

"Al-Qaeda's agenda for one is very political, so it is wrong to put a religious label to it."

Shireen also said that a more united Muslim world could fight the growing discrimination, especially in the West, against Muslim countries and their people.

On relations between Malaysia and Pakistan, she said there must be a continued will by both sides to strengthen ties, as complacency would not help.

She hoped that Asean would not be influenced by any move by India to deny Pakistan's request to become a full dialogue partner with Asean.

Other speakers at the seminar were Wisma Putra undersecretary of the OIC Datuk Sopian Ahmad, NST senior editor Azhar Raswan Dean, director of Pakistan's Area Study Centre for Far East & Southeast Asia Professor Hidayat Ali Soomro, and former diplomat Datuk Sallehuddin Abdullah.