

16/10/2003

KL's contribution to OIC's formation

Noor Adzman Baharuddin

THE choice of Malaysia as host of the 10th OIC Summit is timely considering it has contributed immensely to its activities since the grouping's inception more than three decades ago.

In fact, Kuala Lumpur had played a major role in the formation of the OIC in Rabat, Morocco on Sept 25, 1969 after the late Saudi Arabian ruler King Feisal handpicked his close friend, the late Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra, as the organisation's first secretary-general in 1970.

The Tengku, who was the country's first Prime Minister, took it in his stride to spearhead the largest grouping of the Islamic world for three years.

Coming a full circle, the OIC will now be chaired by Malaysia and the changing of leadership will take place when the 57-nation grouping meets in Putrajaya.

Malaysia will also be the first OIC member in the Asia-Pacific region to host the Summit.

The senior officials meeting is on Oct 11, followed by the Foreign Ministers Meeting on Oct 13 while the Summit begins on Oct 16.

The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah al-Thani, will hand over the chairmanship to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

During its formation, the inter-governmental organisation had decided to pool its resources and efforts and speak with a single voice to safeguard the interest and ensure the progress and well-being of its people and those of other Muslims the world over.

The first meeting of the world's Islamic leaders was prompted by an arson perpetrated by Zionist elements on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in occupied Jerusalem on Aug 21, 1969.

It was a gathering to show oneness among Muslims in defending their honour, dignity and faith in facing the assault on the holy city of Al-Quds and the mosque, the first Qibla and third holiest Shrine in Islam.

The inaugural conference, also known as the Rabat Summit, saw leaders of the Islamic world condemn the destruction of Al-Aqsa, to liberate Jerusalem from Zionist occupation.

Six months after that meeting, in March 1970, the First Islamic Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held in Jeddah, which also houses a permanent General Secretariat, to ensure a liaison among member states and charged it to co-ordinate its action.

The conference appointed Tengku Abdul Rahman as its Secretary-General and chose Jeddah as the headquarters of the OIC, pending the liberation of Jerusalem, which would be the permanent headquarters.

In February 1972, the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, meeting in its Third Session, adopted the Charter of the Organisation.

The charter was aimed at strengthening solidarity and co-operation among Islamic states in the political, economic, cultural, scientific and social fields.

Under the Charter, the OIC aims to:

1. Strengthen:

\* Islamic solidarity among member states;

\* Co-operation in the political, economic, social, cultural and scientific fields:

\* The struggle of all Muslim people to safeguard their dignity, independence and national rights.

2. Co-ordinate action to:

- \* Safeguard the holy places;

- \* Support the struggle of the Palestinian people and help them in recovering their rights and liberating their occupied territories.

3. Work to:

- \* Eliminate racial discrimination and all forms of colonialism;

- \* Create a favourable atmosphere for the promotion of co-operation and understanding between member states and other countries.

The Charter also enumerates principles which OIC member states undertake to inspire themselves from, to achieve the goals of the organisation.

The Charter also enumerates the principles governing OIC activities, namely:

- \* Full equality among member states.

- \* Observation of the right to self determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.

- \* Observation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each state.

- \* The settlement of any dispute that might arise among member states by peaceful means such as negotiations, mediation, conciliation and arbitration.

- \* A pledge to refrain, in relations among member states, from resorting to force or threatening to resort to the use of force against the unity and territorial integrity or the political independence of any one of them.

To achieve its goals, the organisation has main bodies, secondary organs, institutions and specialised committees.

The OIC is composed of the following main bodies:

- \* The conference of kings and heads of state and government is the supreme authority of the organisation, which meets once every three years to lay down its policy.

- \* The conference of foreign ministers, which meets once a year to examine a progress report on the implementation of its decisions taken within the framework of the policy defined by the summit.

- \* The general secretariat, which is the executive organ of the organisation, entrusted with the implementation of the decisions of the two preceding bodies.

To co-ordinates and boosts its action, align its view points and stands, and be credited with concrete results in the fields of political, economic, cultural, social, spiritual and scientific, among member states, the organisation has created different committees, nearly all at ministerial level, a number of which is chaired by heads of state.

The Al-Quds Committee, the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC), the Standing Committee for Economic and Trade Co-operation (COMCEC), the Standing Committee for Scientific and Technical Co-operation (COMSTECH) and the Islamic Peace Committee are the ones chaired by heads of state.

Fourteen other committees deal with other important issues such as Palestine, the Sahel, Afghanistan and Kashmir.