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Outcry over Dr Mahathir's remarks makes no sense

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IF you approach the Putrajaya Convention Centre at night, you will be struck by the sheer beauty of the new landmark in the country's administrative capital.

You can be excused for thinking that it's a big space station which has landed to pick up supplies and have some servicing done.

With the rows of street lights leading to the PCC which is located on a hilltop, the view is awe inspiring, depending on one's perspective, of course.

Which leads me to the outcry from some countries following Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech at the opening of the 10th Summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

According to the wire services (if they are accurate, that is), the Prime Minister's remarks have elicited comments ranging from "unacceptable" to "dangerous" and from "offensive" to "deplorable". I'm not surprised if these comments increase in their negativity as the days go by.

Imagine. These are reactions from so-called world leaders who have often declared that they are promoters of freedom of speech and a democratic way of life.

While they give themselves leeway in criticising others, even to the point of appointing themselves as promoters and defenders of world democracy, their views, much less their actions, cannot be questioned or criticised.

Even our High Commissioner in London was summoned by the British Foreign Office over Dr Mahathir's remarks.

Some of us flipped when we read the news item datelined London: "UK summons Malaysian diplomat over comments on Jews."

Someone in Kuala Lumpur makes a comment on Jews and a representative of the Government is hauled up by a foreign Government.

A bit odd, to say the least. What next? Seek permission before one can utter anything?

I read Dr Mahathir's speech again. If one is to take offence at his speech, then I suppose everyone sympathetic to the Palestinian cause may have reason to be upset and appalled.

Quite clearly Dr Mahathir questioned the wisdom of violence and aggression as the method to be used to seek independence, justice and freedom.

His opinion of the suicide bombings for instance could trigger angry reaction from the Muslim world, but they did not.

In paragraphs 49 and 50 of his speech, the Prime Minister clearly said: "The Quran tells us that when the enemy sues for peace, we must react positively.

"True, the treaty offered is not favourable to us. But we can negotiate. The Prophet did, at Udaibiyah. And in the end he triumphed.

"I am aware that all these ideas will not be popular. Those who are angry would want to reject it out of hand. They would even want to silence anyone who makes or supports this line of action.

"They would want to send more young men and women to make the supreme sacrifice. But where will all these lead to? Certainly not victory.

"Over the last 50 years of fighting in Palestine, we have not achieved any result. We have in fact worsened our situation."

It's unfortunate that the Muslim world's most moderate and pragmatic leader is being taken to task for a speech whose tone and spirit offer a sobering thought to all peace loving people.

Dr Mahathir fully realises that Muslim hardliners, whose numbers are big and habitat widespread, would be greatly upset and even angry at these remarks.

Instead, his speech was greeted with applause, even from allies of the United States of America.

If at all anyone would be upset, it would be the Palestinians who may feel that Dr Mahathir's views appear to relegate their cause. Betrayed even, some may want to say.

Dr Mahathir has always been one to say what he means and means what he says. The Palestinian cause has never been away from the Prime Minister's thoughts at all.

It is a pity that some blinkered leaders chose to ignore Dr Mahathir's balanced arguments. One may conclude that they practise selective hearing, an affliction that affects those whose sense of fairplay is faulty, if not dubious.

In the 1980s, before he became Prime Minister, another incomplete reporting on a statement by Dr Mahathir caused an international uproar. I remember that clearly because I was covering that assignment at the Universiti Kebangsaan in Bangi.

The wire services reported Dr Mahathir as saying that "Malaysia would shoot" the "boat people" or illegal immigrants from Indochina if they land on Malaysian shores.

The world rose in indignation. What was not reported was Dr Mahathir's remarks that no such thing could take place unless there is parliamentary sanction.

He knew there would not be anyone who would sanction such thoughts, much less action. But his statement made the world take notice that they have a responsibility to help resolve the boat people situation rather than rely on a small, and at that time, struggling developing country to sort a problem created by the super-powers.

That's Dr Mahathir - forever misunderstood. Well, the OIC leaders have all gone home. There's much for us to be happy and proud about.

For instance, Not far from the PCC is the trade exposition organised to showcase the country's best in commerce and service products.

A lot of locals visited the expo on the opening day, and more thronged the white tents after that.

If more corporations from the private sector had joined in, the expo would have been grander. One must give credit to Rosle Jamaat for work well done though. In fact, the expo yielded some RM256 million worth of business deals. Not bad for a week's work.

But if there's one common complaint about the whole thing during the OIC week, then it must be the lack of signages to the convention centre.

There were more than ample signages leading to the expo but there weren't enough clear, big and attention-grabbing pointers to the convention centre.

But there were no complaints about going to the PCC from the capital city.

Officers, support staff, journalists, exhibitors and almost everyone connected with the OIC could hop onto special chartered buses from designated hotels and sit comfortably and enjoy the ride right to the doorstep of the PCC.

Door to door service for almost 20km in some instances - you can't beat that.

Actually, we are getting better at organising major international

conferences. For those who are looking for faults, they'll get their fair share.

But those who have participated in some major conferences in certain other countries will readily tell you that we have not done badly. Not at all actually.