

17/10/2003

Regaining confidence of Muslims

Shamsul Akmar

A SENIOR delegate from Benin when asked by a journalist from a foreign wire service about the disunity among members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) gave a very succinct reply:

"The teeth sometimes bites the tongue but the tongue never leaves the mouth."

A profound reply which probably reflected the position of most member nations in the OIC, Benin included.

For all the criticisms and cynical remarks made about the OIC, ever since its inception in Rabat, Morocco in 1969, no member nation had ever been expelled or asked to leave.

Burkina Faso director of communications Sylvestre Some, when asked about his nation's expectations of the OIC, said:

"For Muslims in African nations, we are banking on the unity in the OIC, to give us hope and direction."

His reply reflected the fact each member nation had its own expectation of the OIC.

To add to that, each member has its own make-up and political considerations which sometimes run contrary to the interests of the OIC.

But the OIC had stood the test of time, though there are many who are sceptical about the efficacy of the organisation in solving the problems of member nations.

Said an observer: "Like it or not, Muslim nations do not have much choice but to depend on the OIC."

This is a fact which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad raised in his speech at the opening of the OIC summit yesterday.

"The whole world is looking at us. Certainly, 1.3 billion Muslims, one-sixth of the world's population are placing their hopes in us, in this meeting, even though they may be cynical about our will and capacity to even decide to restore the honour of Islam and the Muslims, much less to free their brothers and sisters from the oppression and humiliation from which they suffer today."

It is against this backdrop that member nations "huddled" together in Putrajaya, hoping to fulfil the hopes of the Muslims.

But there is also another aspect within the OIC which may not be noticed. Much of the attention is given to the "bigger voices" and the bigger issues while those afflicting the "smaller nations" are not attended to.

There is no doubt, as member nations focus on the bigger issues such as that of the Palestinians, the invasion of Iraq, the Israeli attack on Syria and Turkey's plans to deploy troops to Iraq, smaller issues afflicting smaller nations in the OIC are not getting that much attention.

But that is the least of the problems affecting the OIC.

What the organisation needs is to regain the confidence of the Muslim community the world over and that can only be achieved if it can, at the end of the summit spell out clear ideas on solving the problems affecting its members.

The OIC has to accept the fact that a number of member nations which dare not make certain stands individually, are actually hoping for the OIC to take up the cause.

Malaysia had, through Dr Mahathir, shown its preparedness to be the voice of the Muslim nations as well as other Third World countries.

Now, it has the OIC as the platform to amplify the voice. But it will not be able to make the best out of it if member nations do not come forward to explicitly express what they feel and want.

There has been too much rhetoric and lack of substantive action on the part of the OIC.

Malaysia has been viewed as having the clout to take the OIC into higher gear and this expectation is based on the success story of the nation itself.

"The only problem is that much as Malaysia and Dr Mahathir had been very vocal on the international forum in expressing the displeasure over the treatment of Muslim nations by the Western forces and Tel Aviv regime, there is a deafening silence on the part of other members," said a Malaysian observer.

That, is definitely not a tongue-in-cheek remark.