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OIC a test for substantive solutions to Muslim, world problems

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WE are being tested again. As hosts of the Summit for the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, our ability to organise a summit of this nature is being scrutinised again. We've done it before, the most recent being the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in February. We did rather well on that one.

Several years ago, I attended an OIC summit in a north African country. The Malaysian delegation was led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Many heads of state and government attended the summit and I was awestruck to find myself in the midst of a gathering of such importance.

The issues facing the ummah were being debated and argued, some without any conclusive ending, others were full of rhetoric and countless quotations from the Quran. Many of the issues are still with the ummah today, and far from being resolved. At the end of the day, OIC members went home still searching for the elusive (and some say mythical) Muslim unity.

At that north African summit, it appeared to me then that it was difficult, if not impossible, for the Muslims to reach substantial accord on issues confronting them. Imagine, the host couldn't even get the timing of the opening ceremony right!

All summit leaders were told to be at the conference venue at a certain time for the opening ceremony. Dr Mahathir, a stickler for punctuality, made his way there with several other leaders.

After a rather long wait, everyone was told that the opening ceremony had been postponed to the afternoon because several leaders were not yet ready.

How could this be, we muttered to ourselves. But that was how the summit was organised, at the whims and fancies of several people who showed no respect for others, including their own state guests.

At another summit in a western African country, a uniformed, gun-carrying security personnel ran away with a colleague's check-in luggage. My colleague gave chase. It was a case of "follow that car". The chase took him through some alleys and side-roads, forgetting that he had put himself at great risk. He got his luggage back, and nothing happened to the luggage snatcher.

I'm quite sure we will do much better than these two hosts. With the experience we have in hosting major international meetings and conferences, we should do well again.

One of our strengths, perhaps, is the attention to detail whenever we play hosts. It was good to see the various rehearsals taking place as the summit nears, especially the motorcades and security drills to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

The bigger test, of course, lies with the participating members. While the forum can help provide a conducive atmosphere to deliberations at the new Putrajaya Convention Centre, the world will be watching for the substantive outcome from within the conference room.

I'm sure the rhetoric will be there, but the question before the OIC is whether it can move Governments to make real improvements to problems facing not just the ummah but the rest of the world as well.

Will the OIC come up with realistic approaches to seek a lasting and peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue?

Will the OIC offer fresh initiatives to improve the economic lot of its members, and look at self-help programmes if the world continues to ignore

their plight?

Can the OIC be an effective rallying point for Muslim countries, given the fact that several members have their qibla elsewhere?

The world is watching. Malaysia will assume the chairmanship of the OIC from Qatar whose capital Doha was used as the Central Command for the American forces when they invaded Iraq.

Malaysia, others outside the country are saying, and saying it often, is the logical choice to head the much-maligned OIC.

More than anyone else, Dr Mahathir's views vis-a-vis the problems facing Muslims have both been hard-hitting and truthful. In numerous speeches at home and abroad, he has called on Muslims the world over to re-examine their faith and their interpretation of Islam, which many Muslims profess to be a religion of peace and justice.

Dr Mahathir has hit hard at both the critics of Islam and its followers. His moderate views ought to make non-Muslims understand the religion better. Dr Mahathir's views as a Muslim in managing international relations should help dispel the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists and blood-letting individuals.

The 10th OIC Summit this week should go beyond rhetoric and self-examination. It's time for realistic action. The Muslims must defend their faith at all costs, no doubt about that. But they must also understand that violence begets violence.

Non-Muslim countries too must be prepared to listen. Their violent and unilateral action will not help promote peace, including in their own backyards.

Keeping A Level Head In Business

ANUWAR is a young man on a mission. He is a businessman who seems to be moving up the ladder in Langkawi.

Anuwar and his wife moved to the legendary island a few years ago to set up home and look for business opportunities. He did well as a landscape contractor.

In his younger days, Anuwar sold cut fruits at the canteen of a publishing firm in Kuala Lumpur.

It was a small beginning, one that not many people noticed. But to him, this was where he learnt to keep his books, to balance his accounts, to learn costing and to manage his cash flow.

He did well enough to save and move on to new fields and challenges.

When I met him in Langkawi during the International Aerospace and Maritime exhibition, Anuwar was entrusted by a Malay tycoon to manage the Kuala Melaka River Park.

He organises events to fill the park with activities. He has moved on from selling fruits to event management.

In fact, he has a booth at the OIC exhibition in Putrajaya, displaying his goods and services.

He was in his two-door Mercedes in Langkawi last week, while a Jaguar was parked alongside, when I asked if the cars were his trademark of wealth and status.

"I'm also in the car rental business, brother," he told me softly.

I felt relieved. If a young businessman, still learning his trade, is already blatantly displaying such wealth, then it would be a matter of time before his business collapses without enough attention to consolidation.

I hope Anuwar will continue to be level-headed and use his energy to become more successful. Syabas.