

## OIC seeks to revitalise itself



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### CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The principal theme of the conference was how to make this organisation of the 57 Muslim countries of the world more effective and to have a say in world affairs commensurate with their numerical strength in the comity of nations. The Islamic body's reaction to the major issues and global incidents that occurred since 9/11 terrorism were conspicuously present by its absence. Such shortcomings could be overcome, according to most participants, by revitalising the Organisation through a series of measures in the nature of structural reforms, redefining of functions and

infusion of new blood to spur initiative and drive. Only in that way, the Islamic Ummah would be able to forge its hitherto absent unity and truly manifest its commitment.

The unprecedented and terrible terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 caused a fundamental change and added a new dimension to the global strategy of some major members of the international community. The revised perspectives of the United States and its staunch ally, the United Kingdom, imparted a new direction to their policy in which war on terrorism became preponderant. This followed invasion of Iraq and intensification of violence in the Middle East and, finally, Israeli attacks on Syria. All these developments sadly divided the Islamic world further and their principal platform, OIC, miserably failed to take a common public stand on these issues. The friendship between the two traditional allies, United States and Saudi Arabia, also witnessed fine cracks due specially to allegation of support from some Saudi quarters to Al-Qaida and other terrorist networks.

The addresses delivered at the conference sessions by the heads of delegations, as expected, strongly advocated unity, mutual cooperation and interdependence on one another. They extolled virtues of the lofty ideals and heroes of Islam. A business forum was organised as an adjunct to the conference and was attended by a sizeable section of entrepreneurs from the Islamic world, emphasising the dire need for fostering greater collaboration, specially in trade and economic sectors. The aim was to gradually secure freedom from dependence on and dominance by the western world. It appeared the stark truth had finally dawned upon the participants. The task of finding ways and means to revitalise the OIC through reforms and restructuring was entrusted with the TROIKA or the three-member group composed of the past, present and future Chairmen of the OIC. They may devise the necessary steps, including possible formation of a group of eminent persons or wise men to study and formulate plans of action.

The speech of the newly elected Chairman of the OIC, Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, caused most stir and great controversy that reverberated the world over. Dr.

Mahathir's speech was, as anticipated, among the latest of his usual hard-hitting ones. However, this time it was not the West in general but the Jews, in particular, meaning International Zionism, controlling and directing major world powers to act in accordance with their design and choice. The 1.3 billion Muslims of the world cannot be defeated by a few million Jews, he declared. The Jews acted in proxy and were making others fight for them and die for them. On the other hand, young Muslims were blowing themselves up, killing people and inviting the massacre of more of their own people. There must be other alternatives, the new OIC Chairman asserted. These remarks were immediately condemned and severely criticised by the government of Israel as well as Zionist or their favoured organisations in America and all over the world. Even Germany summoned the Malaysian Charge d'Affaires to convey their displeasure. Mahathir's statement was viewed by them as racist, inflammatory and war-mongering. But, an overwhelming majority of the Muslims appeared to have appreciated his address, which revealed something that stayed in their heart but could not come out of their mouth. Many observers indicated that Mahathir's statement was directed towards the awakening of the Muslim Ummah from their slumber rather than to initiate an orchestrated campaign against Jewish intransigence and aggression. Some others, however, remarked that the vehement criticisms of Mahathir's remarks proved that there must have been some truth in what he had said.

The other noteworthy speech in the conference hall was delivered by President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation, paradoxically, outside the ambit of the conference itself. He addressed the OIC members after one of the OIC sessions was declared over. In reply to my question during the bilateral talks with our Prime Minister, Mahathir stated that in the absence of a relevant provision in the OIC Charter, Putin was invited as a guest of host Mahathir. Putin stated that the Russian cooperation within the framework of the OIC might also constitute an extremely important element of a just and safe world. He reiterated the coordinating role of the UN in resolving international problems and advocated joint efforts to that end. He also warned that terrorism must not be identified with any religion, cultural tradition or way of life, and spoke against exploitation of religious slogans to carry out armed aggression against one's brothers and allies. He cited the case of Chechen Republic as an example. Of course, at the same time he did not fail to remind every state's commitment to the principles of non-intervention in internal affairs and respect for territorial integrity of sovereign states.

Invitation to the Russian President to address the OIC Summit participants raised many an eyebrow. Once an invitation is extended to a non-Muslim country to address the OIC leaders, albeit in a circuitous way, it may pose a dubious precedent, which interested countries may wish to take advantage of in future. Delegates were speculating that countries like China and India with large Muslim population might wish to follow suit, to the discomfort of some original members. It transpired that the invitation to Putin had been advocated by Saudi Arabia and acquiesced by Malaysia. It was argued that Russia's association with the OIC would bolster the strength of that organisation. Some even went to the extent of viewing the move as a counter to the strength of the leaders of the unipolar world, specially in the context of the situation arising out of the 9/11 incident.

The issue of candidacy for the post of Secretary General of the OIC came up in quiet diplomacy during the conference. Bangladesh had already fielded a candidate for the post. Malaysia declared it would also put up one. Turkey is understood to play the wait and see game. The final decision will be taken at the forthcoming ICFM to be held in Turkey sometime in May next year. Since the appointment will be made on the basis of consensus to be ascertained by the Turkish Foreign Minister as Chairman, Turkey's role will, therefore, be of paramount importance on this issue. As of now, a large number of member-states have accorded support to Bangladesh's candidature, despite some adverse propaganda launched by some interested quarters.

But, if Mahathir wished to become the Secretary General, despite his outspoken nature and hard-hitting anti-Western posture, he would be a formidable candidate. But Mahathir consistently denied he was interested in the post of Secretary General of the OIC. On the other hand, he always nurtured the possibility of playing a significant role in international and regional politics even after retirement. He consistently spoke and sought to uphold interests of both the developing world and the Islamic Ummah. People there regard him as a leader of vision, drive and commitment whose talent must continue to be utilised for the common good of those people.

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## The month of abstinence and meditation

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THE Holy month of Ramadan occupies a unique place in the Islamic calendar. It is the only month which has been explicitly described and analysed in the Holy Quran. The very fact that the revelation of the Holy Quran commenced in Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Arabic year, testifies to the sanctity, graciousness and divine excellence of this sacred month.

The Holy Quran testifies: "Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). "What is more, it was in this glorious month that Hazrat Ibrahim (pbuh) was blessed with the divine "Sahifa". It was in this month of divine majesty that the Holy "Taurat" reached mankind through Hazrat Musa (pbuh). It was again in this holy month of sublime excellence that the sacred "Zabur" saw the light of day through Hazrat Daud (pbuh). And last but not the least, Hazrat Isa (pbuh) had the privileged and honour of receiving the divine Revelation of the Holy "Injil" on the 12th of Ramadan.

"Ramadan" is derived from the word "Ramz" which means 'to burn', 'to scorch'. The root meaning of "Ramadan" is excessiveness of heat; the month was so called because "when they changed the names of the months from the ancient language they named them according to the seasons in which they fell, and this month agreed with the days of excessive heat". Some say that it is one of the names of Allah, but there is no reliable authority to testify to this claim.

Allah ordains in the Holy Quran: "Whosoever of you is present during this month (the month of Ramadan) should spend it in fasting, but if any one is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later".

The fast of Ramadan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hegira. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state.

When the Holy Prophet (pbuh) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura (on the tenth of Muharram) the day on which Allah delivered Moses (pbuh) and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas (RA), the holy Prophet (pbuh) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day and he who has not shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura." When the fast of Ramadan was prescribed in the second year of the Hegira, the fast on those days was abolished. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "The fast of Ramadan has abolished every other fast. "But according to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua (RA), the Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "Whoever wishes may fast upon it (the day of Ashoura), and whoever wishes may drop it."

"The third stage deals with the period of abstinence and indulgence -- there were times of abstinence during the night as well as during the day. When a man had said the Isha prayers, he was supposed to abstain from Mustirat, i. e. food, drink and sex. Moreover, if a man fell asleep (even before saying the Isha prayers) he had to abstain when he awoke. The mere saying of Isha prayers and sleep forced a man into a state of abstinence for the rest of the night and the following day until sunset. But al-Siyam does never stand for self-torture. The Holy Quran testifies: "Allah does not want to put you to difficulties.

(He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify him in that he has guided you; and

deprived of it" (Ibn Maja transmitted it). The Holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) also said, "The one who fasts has two occasions of joy, one when he breaks his fast and one when he meets his Lord" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Salman Al-Farsi (RA) told of Allah's Messenger (pbuh) "If someone draws near to God during it with some good act he will be like one who fulfils an obligatory duty in another month, and he who fulfils an obligatory duty in it will be like one who fulfils seventy obligatory duties in another month. It is the month of endurance, and the reward of endurance is paradise" (Baihaqi transmitted it).

The Holy month of Ramadan has come once again to teach us that the temporary renunciation of food and drinks, sex and greed makes the fulfilment of the basic desires even more pleasant. Must we not forget even for a moment that there is a gulf of difference between Roza and ordinary fasting. Al-Siyam in Ramadan is something much nobler, much sublimer, more solemn than mere fasting. "It is an armour", declares the holy Prophet (pbuh), "with which one protects oneself". Let us, therefore, celebrate the month of Ramadan in a befitting way, not through lavish Iftar parties and expensive dress (for the ensuing Eid), not through extravagance and prodigality, but through Taqwa and Tarawi, Zakat and Fitra, self-restraint and benevolence, prayers and penance.

perchance ye shall be grateful".

Fasting is an ancient form of worship recognised by all previous religions, even the heathen ones. But Islam introduced a new vision, a new idea, a new spirit into the institution of fasting. For the first time in history, fasting was blessed with a systematic regulation, a scientific method, a noble justification. In the days before the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) fasting meant the suffering of some privation in the hours of mourning and sorrow. Islam introduced a revolutionary innovation and al-Siyam stood not for mere suffering or abstinence but for an institution for the moral uplift and spiritual elevation of the human soul.

A Muslim fast never indicates mere abstinence from food and drinks and sex, and fasting in Islam is never meant for self-torture. The restraint from the animal instincts for food, drink and sex enables the attention of a man or a woman to be directed to higher and nobler aspects. Fasting in the light of Islam helps us to overcome lusts and thereby sets us at the mouth of the road leading to perfection -- perfection to be achieved through prayers and penance, Taqwa and Tarawwi, contemplation and acts of charity, total restraint and abstinence from all evil acts and thoughts. The self-restraint of Taqwa, indeed, has to be a voluntary effort comprising the elements of caution, alertness and fear of Allah.

Al-Siyam or the fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, one of the five pillars of Arkans of Islam, is indeed a boon, a divine privilege, a glorious opportunity unparalleled by any other act of piety or worship. Abu Huraira (RA) reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying, "When Ramadan begins the gates of heaven are opened, the gates of Jahannam are locked, and the devils are chained" (Bukhari and

Muslim). Sahl b. Sa'd (RA) reported Rasul Allah (pbuh) as saying, "In paradise there are eight gates among which is a gate called Ar-Rayyan which only those who fast will enter" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Abu Huraira (RA) reported Nabi Kareem (pbuh) as saying, "He who fasts during Ramadan with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven; he who prays during the night in Ramadan with faith and seeking his reward will have his past sins forgiven; and he who passes Lailat al-Qadr in prayer with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Anas b. Malik (RA) told of God's Messenger (pbuh) saying when Ramadan began, "This month as come to you, and it contains a night which is better than a thousand months. He who is deprived of it is deprived of all good, but only those who are denied prosperity are