

"Most of us, I believe, are unhappy with the progress of the peace process in Palestine. The Israelis have been dilatory and insincere. But wrecking the peace process will not get us anywhere. Indeed if the sabotage succeeds it will force us to begin all over again. And how can we believe that the strategy which got us nowhere after decades of costly struggle will achieve success if we begin again? I appeal to all Palestinian patriot of all shades and political leanings to unite and strengthen their resolve so that the small gains that they have made can be consolidated and enhanced. In time, you will achieve your objective."<sup>47</sup>

Before his retirement, Dr. Mahathir made another immense contribution to the Islamic *ummah* with the successful hosting of the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC Summit Conference in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Reviewing his opening address, one could note the extensive Islamic dimension of the Malaysian foreign policy notably the Palestinian issue. In his words;

"To begin with, the government of all the Muslim countries can close ranks and have a common stand if not on all issues, at least on some major ones, such as on Palestine. We are all Muslims. We are all oppressed. We are all being humiliated. But we who have been raised by Allah above our fellow Muslims to rule our countries have never really tried to act in concert in order to exhibit at our level the brotherhood and unity that Islam enjoins upon us."<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the opening remark, he championed the theme of Islamic unity vigorously and assertively. He also declared courageously that the Jews and their proxy are the main causes for the current Palestinian plight. In one of his statements he said;

47. A speech delivered at the 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of the OIC in Tehran, Iran on December 9, 1997. See also Makaruddin, Hashim, 2000.

48. An opening speech delivered at the 10<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference at Putrajaya, Malaysia on October 16, 2003.

"We are actually very strong. 1.3 billion people cannot be simply wiped out. The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them."<sup>49</sup>

Remarkably, the Islamic issue, particularly the Palestinian Issue, during the Mahathir administration, had been receiving an overwhelming attention from the government and public. It is apparent that Mahathir's commitment to the Islamic issue was even more pronounced and assertive than that of his predecessors. Inevitably, the co-option of Anwar Ibrahim, ABIM's president, in the government before the 1982 General Election, had intensified the collaboration between government and the civil society groups, particularly ABIM and PERKIM, in the *Ummatic* issue. The government's vigorous efforts to enhance its Islamic image internally and internationally, was no doubt, partly motivated by its desire to preempt and defuse the consistent charge of PAS, and other political and non-political Islamic-based groups, that it had not doing enough to support the cause of Islam at home and abroad.

## CONCLUSION

Doubtless, Islam has constituted a powerful weapon in the struggle for political supremacy in Malaysia. To face intra-Malay rivalry, Islam has been used by successive Malaysian Prime Ministers as a continuing source of political legitimacy, and a shield against external interference in Malay politics. In their literature and activities since independence, the themes of Malayism and Islamism are, therefore, tightly fused together. As such, Malaysia since Tunku has pursued a pro-Muslim stand in its foreign policy. Curtailment of Islam may at any rate injure UMNO's image among the Malay-Muslim voters, thus the support of the Palestinian cause becomes inevitable and of utmost political necessity. Due to the intra-Malay political rivalry, especially from PAS, the government has also been fully aware of the power of Islamic resurgence at home and abroad, thus has given its full support to the Palestinian struggle.

49. *Ibid.*