

With regard to the political aspect, Tun Razak stressed that Malaysia managed to strengthen unity with the Arab countries through its firm stand against Israeli occupation of Arab lands.¹⁷

Malaysia pro-Arab attitude in the Palestinian issue during Tun Razak was clearly manifested in its unreserved support for the Arab cause in the West Asian conflict. All the joint-*communiqués*, signed between Malaysia and the Arab States during the Premier's visit of January 1975, reiterated the conviction that the liberation of occupied Arab lands and the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people were prerequisites for a lasting peace in the Middle East. They also reaffirmed their recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people¹⁸ Indeed, the government active association with the Islamic world, like the successful hosting of the Fifth Islamic Conference in Kuala Lumpur, had really enhanced its image abroad, but particularly at home among the Malay-Muslims. This is indeed a crucial part of the government's drive of image rebuilding especially in the post 1969 riot.

Malaysia involvement with the Islamic nations is not only confined to the political and economic spheres. Association with the Muslim world enabled Malaysia to promote greater cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science and technology. For instance, Tun Abdul Razak signed in 1975 a treaty with the Gulf States to exchange scientists, professors, students, journalists and sport elite. In the same year, he also concluded an agreement on economic, technical and cultural cooperation with Oman and the UAE.¹⁹ The next administration under the leadership of Tun Hussein Onn continued this policy by signing in 1977 an economic, scientific and technical agreement with Libya and the Arab Republic of Egypt.²⁰

Beside the principles of non-alignment and regionalism, the third Premier of Malaysia, Tun Hussein also adopted the concept of Islamic solidarity. Thus he upgraded relations with the Muslim countries, particularly the Arab states, and enhanced participation in the International Islamic Organizations, especially in the OIC. At the

17. *ibid*

18. See, *The Straits Times*, 23 January 1975, *New Straits Times*, 27 January 1975 and *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, March 1975, pp.7-22.

19. *Utusan Malaysia*, 23 January 1975 and 25 January 1975.

20. *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, March 1977, pp.6-13.

inaugural meeting of the Regional Islamic Organization of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP) on November 10, 1980, Tun Hussein stressed his government's commitment towards Islam and the Islamic world. In his words;

"Although the Malaysian society is multi-religious, Islam has been made the official religion of the country. The Federal and State Constitution guarantee the freedom of worship. Our national ideology, the Rukun Negara, provides for the belief in God. Malaysia has always supported the cause of Islam. It takes an active part in the Islamic Conference and the Islamic Development Bank. It is also active in the propagation of Islamic faith. We believe that material development alone cannot ensure the [health of a] nation; we also attach great importance to spiritual development."²¹

Admitting that material benefits were one of the priceless rewards of brotherly ties with the Islamic world, Tun Hussein continued Tun Razak's pragmatic strategy of using Islam as a binding force, which was instrumental for Malaysian development (Nair, Shanti 1997). Identified as a growing source of loans and investment capital for Malaysia, relations with the 'oil powers' were upgraded to underscore the Prime Minister's belief that Islam was indeed capable of bringing about prosperity and progress. Such ties were actively sought, and provided substantial resources for the Third Malaysian Plan, with wide publicity for loans and agreements signed with countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.²²

Tun Hussein's first visit outside ASEAN, was to Saudi Arabia. In 1977, Malaysia obtained M\$193 million from the Saudi Fund for Development, and concluded several important trade, technology and scientific agreements with Iraq. By 1978, total Arab loans to Malaysia stood at M\$329 million. Under the Third Malaysian Plan, Libya provided M\$25 million towards development projects while Saudi Arabia gave a M\$200 million loan pact (Nair, Shanti, 1997).

21. *Koleksi Ucapan Tun Hussein Onn 1980* (Kuala Lumpur: National Archive of Malaysia and Prime Minister's Department) p. 199

22. *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, March 1977