

Malaysia, under Tun Hussein, had been commended for the propagation of Islam, and the development of Islamic world. PERKIM, still under the patronage of the ex-Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was the most successful beneficiary of this form of International funding with a gift of M\$12 million from Libya. In 1978, Kuwait pledged M\$15 million to the Perak State Religious Department, and Saudi Arabia pledged M\$3.5 million for a proposed religious school.²³

Reviewing Malaysia's political scenario under Tun Hussein's administration, one would realize that his government's commitment to the cause of Islam, locally and internationally, was inevitable and urgent. The growth of global Islamic resurgence in the second half of the 1970's, whose impact was vividly noticed in Malaysia, posed a serious challenge to Tun Hussein's government.²⁴ The rise of transnational da'wah activity, as a sequence of the global Islamic resurgence, spearheaded by three most important da'wah organizations: ABIM, Jama'at Tabligh and Dar al-Arqam, had further challenged the power of the government (Means, Gordon P., 1970: 71-74).

The strength and growth of such non-government organizations continued to challenge the domestic and external policies of the Malaysian government throughout the 1970's. Despite a renewed initiative to give attention to Malaysia's relation with Islamic nations in the Middle East and Africa, it was clear that the government had yet to work out an appropriate response to the impact of International Islamic revivalism on Malay-Muslim society (Nair, Shanti, 1997: 72). Curtailment of this movement was at any rate expected to be injurious to the image of the government. Thus it felt that closer active commitment to the Islamic cause, like the Palestinian problem, would be somewhat imperative and urgent to secure legitimacy amidst the challenge of the world-wide revival of Islam in the 1970's.

The Malaysian government under Tun Hussein consistently and firmly believed that any solution to the problem of the Middle East had to take into account the rights of the concerned Arab states to

23. *New Straits Times* 17 October 1978 and 16 November 1978. Also see, *Islamic Herald*, Vol.4, No. 5 & 6, 1979.

24. For details on Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia see; Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia", *Asian Survey*, vol. XXI, no.10, October 1981, pp.1040-1059; Judith Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia", *Pacific Affairs*, vol.53, no.3.

regain their lost territories. It further insisted that no solution in the Middle East could be achieved without full consideration to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, and their inalienable rights to return to their homes and properties, and to achieve self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

As already mentioned, Tun Hussein's policies were somewhat a continuation of Tun Razak's pragmatic initiatives, especially his pro-Arab policy. Realizing that foreign trade and investment were of greater importance for Malaysia, Tun Hussein consolidated and intensified relations with Muslim countries in West Asia. He visited Saudi Arabia in 1976, Egypt and Libya in January 1977, and Turkey and Iraq in February 1977.²⁵ Various agreements had been concluded between the parties concerned during these visits, thus developed a great momentum and impetus in the cooperation between Malaysia and those countries in the fields of trade, economy, technology, culture and science.²⁶ From the official communiqué issued at the close of every visit, one could clearly see, beside mutual cooperation, the urgency of the Middle East issue, particularly the cause of the Arab-Palestinians and their plight.

The resurgence of Islam had motivated, if not forced, UMNO, the leading Malay party, to be on its guard because the revival has in fact being translated into political benefit by its rival, PAS. Consequently, the government had to upgrade its commitment to Islam, and to treat Islamic issues more effectively in order not to offend Malay-Muslim sensibilities. Islamization was then taken by the government as a means to attract Malay voters in the election amidst PAS challenge. Tun Hussein once commented:

"You may wonder why we spend so much money on Islam. You may think it is a waste of money. If we don't we face two major problems. First, Party Islam (PAS) will get at us. The party will and does claim that we're not religious and the people will lose faith. The second, we have to strength the faith of the people which is another way to fight communism."²⁷

25. See *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, March 1977, p.10.

26. Ibid.

27. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 9, 1979, p.15.