

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 1977.³⁹ Various agreements had been concluded between the parties concerned during these visits, thus developing a great momentum and impetus in the cooperation between Malaysia and those countries in the fields of trade, economy, technology, culture and science.⁴⁰ From the official communiqué issued at the close of every visit, one could clearly see, besides mutual cooperation, the urgency of the Middle East issue, particularly the cause of the Arab-Palestinians and their plight. Another Islamic-humanitarian issue that gained much attention from the Malaysian government during Tun Hussein's tenure was the plight of the Afghan Muslims who were victims of Soviet aggression.⁴¹ The armed Soviet intervention in Afghanistan on December 27, 1979 was formally condemned by a vast majority of the UN member states, including Malaysia, as an act violating the principle of international conduct as enshrined in the UN Charter.

The concept of Islamic fraternity was another factor that motivated the Malaysian government to support the Afghan cause. 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 been 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

³⁹ See *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, March 1977, p.10

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Islamic Herald*, vol.12, no.4, 1988, p.29

offend Malay-Muslim sensibilities. Islamization was then taken by the government as a means to attract Malay voters in the election amidst the 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 strengthen the faith of the people which is another way to fight communism.⁴²

Reviewing the address of His Majesty at the opening of the Fifth Parliamentary Meeting on March 16, 1981, one could also note the considerable Islamic dimension of the Malaysian foreign policy. In his address, the King emphasized:

My government is also concerned with International developments, such as the continuing conflict between Islamic states in West Asia and the Palestinian issue. The external aggression against Afghanistan is fraught with dark implications. In the light of these developments, my government is currently involved in several International organizations with a view to settling these disputes. I am also pleased that my government has been accorded high standing amongst Islamic nations. My government will also continue with efforts to consolidate cooperation and ties amongst Islamic nations.⁴³

⁴² *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 9, 1979, p.15

⁴³ *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, vol. 14, no. 1-4, March 1981, p.65