

Mahathir later, shifted Malaysia's foreign policy from being essentially pro-Western and ASEAN-based to one with an increasing International profile and identification with the Third World problems.⁴⁴ Dr. Mahathir succeeded in bringing Malaysia to the fore, especially among the Third World countries, by voicing forcefully their aspiration and aims. Altaf Gauhar, Secretary General of the Third World Foundation, acknowledged Malaysia as a champion of the less developed Third World countries.⁴⁵ Significantly, Islam assumed growing prominence under Mahathir's administration. The cause of Islam can rightly be said to constitute the second most important dimension in his foreign policy throughout the 1980's. Dr. Mahathir's placement of the OIC and "pan-Islamism" at the second rung of Malaysia's foreign policy priority list in 1981, clearly testifies to this fact.⁴⁶

Throughout the 1980's, Malaysia increasingly sought to identify itself with International Islamic issues, and as an active member of the global Islamic community. Both government and UMNO rhetoric increasingly referred to Malaysia as an Islamic nation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ At the Islamic Development Bank Meeting in Istanbul in May 1982, Malaysia for instance, urged, in the words of its Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the rich Muslim countries to adopt appropriate policies and measures to counteract adverse international economic development affecting Third World nations. See, *Islamic Herald*, vol. 6, no. 3 & 4, 1982, p. 43.

⁴⁵ Azizi Zariza Ahmad, *Mahathir's Paradigm Shift: The Man Behind the Vision*, (Perak: Firma Malaysia Publishing, 1997), p. 137.

⁴⁶ Mohd. Yusof Ahmad, op.cit., p. 270.

⁴⁷ Shanti Nair, op.cit., p.80.

Undoubtedly Mahathir, like his predecessors, continued to consider Islam as an important policy tool to protect, promote and secure Malaysia's national interests within the International world of Islam,⁴⁸ but no radical departure occurred from the one already laid down by the previous administrations. Perhaps it is in regard to the Palestinian issue that a strong sense of continuity could be noted. Though there was no radical departure with regard to the government's attitude towards this issue, some new assertiveness could be noticed during Mahathir's administration. The Pro-Islamic orientation of Mahathir is also evident in foreign policy. It is apparent that Mahathir's leaning towards the Muslim world is even more pronounced than his predecessors. Dr. Mahathir's declaration, in 1983, that Non-Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth were no longer as important to Malaysia as the Muslim Bloc overtly verifies the above fact.⁴⁹

Dr Mahathir's strong commitment to the Islamic cause and the Islamization policy⁵⁰ is partly motivated by his desire of image enhancement at home and abroad, particularly to maintain the legitimacy of UMNO in the eyes of the Malay-Muslim populace. Dr. Mahathir's commitment to the Islamic cause, particularly the

⁴⁸ Mohd Yusof Ahmad, op.cit., p. 271.

⁴⁹ Husin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1995), p. 32.

⁵⁰ An early signal of the Mahathir's administration interest in Islam was the official declaration by Dr. Mahathir in 1984 "to Islamize government machinery". According to him, Islamization policy means "the inculcation of Islamic values in the government. See Hussin Mutalib, *ibid.*, p. 30.