

TWO MONTHS AFTER THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

Psychological warfare, the one which is more serious

TUNKU ABDUR RAHMAN PUTRA INTERVIEWED FOR *IMPACT*

"How could I take on a job which needs so much sacrifice, quiet and sober existence in a land away from all my friends? Many were no doubt surprised, but they do not know that behind this facade of gaiety and care-free life, there also lies inside me extreme piety."

That was the Tunku, Tunku Abdur Rahman Putra. Unlike many he refuses to pretend; he is aware of his shortcomings and at the same time conscious of the "inside", of the abiding values, and of overriding obligations. Tunku does not boast about achievements and progress. He gives an impression of being confident, optimistic and satisfied, but not complacent. A marked difference of mood since his previous interview (*Impact*, 12-25 November, 1971).

The situation at the Secretariat is not what it used to be: no financial contributions and no reply to letters. It has improved and more important, a certain degree of mutuality and trust seems evident. "When matters are urgent I take decision on my own and they accept this as a matter of course and expediency . . . King Feisal too shows much kindness and so do his ministers and officials. My work has been made much less difficult. The organisation which started off with a certain amount of foreboding and lack of optimism is now well under way".

Some ground-work on the cultural projects has been initiated. The Secretariat has started collecting information on the existing Islamic centres and organisations. This is an immense task and would need special allocation of funds. About the Islamic Bank, it is proposed to send two teams of banking experts to visit the member states and discuss the project with local experts and help structurise the whole thing.

Problems? "The one which is more serious and which we have not managed to overcome is the psychological warfare that is being waged against the movement of Islamic unity by the Western press. At first I thought it was an omission on their part to play down the activities of the Secretariat and so I tried to supply them with news but nothing of it appeared in the press, either in Europe or America. One glaring example was the mission to Dacca in July last year. No mention of it ever appeared in the Western press, though even a visit by a British M.P. was given so much prominence. I don't know if the British press gave an adequate coverage to the recent Conference, yes . . . the B.B.C. overseas service carried the news as

a small item. Even the British-owned newspapers in Malaysia played it down.

"It is obvious to me that the intention is to kill the organisation of Muslim unity at birth. What danger they can see in it I do not know now, except perhaps from the Jewish angle this may pose a challenge to their domination in the Middle East.

"Viewing from the political angle they might think that too much power given to the Muslims may harm the European interests in that part of the world. Muslims occupy such strategic and geographical position in the world, particularly in the Middle East, that a strong organised movement may pose serious threat to their missionary activities and to European trade and geo-political interests.

"I personally think it is better to deal with a strong organised group of nations than weak, indecisive and independable ones. Here the unity which has been forged or started has one intention and that is to close the ranks of the Muslims and build a unity which can protect us from exploitation. It is not a negative one."

The problem of misrepresentation and misunderstanding is indeed a big problem but more than anything else, the Muslim world itself has failed to communicate with the vast body of independent public opinion in the West. In fact the flow of communication between Muslim countries themselves is poor both in content and quantum; a great part of it comes through the very European sources. The decision to establish an International Islamic News Agency signified a recognition of the problem but it would be some time before IINA became operational. Saudi Arabia has donated \$40,000 to meet the initial organisation costs and a meeting of the representatives of the national news agencies in the Muslim countries has been called to meet in Kuala Lumpur towards the end of next month. Given due response from all concerned, Tunku felt, a beginning could be made.

Discussing area perspective, Tunku evinced great concern about the problem of the Muslims in the Philippines, the Middle East deadlock and the situation in Bangladesh. The Muslims of Mindanao (South Philippines) are fighting a battle of survival against organised killings and colonisation of their lands but it seems the gravity of the situation is not yet fully realised in the Muslim world.

The problem needed objective projection and a well-organised relief and rehabilitation programme.



"Peace in the Middle East is important to the humanity at large and no less to the Jews themselves. The Jews might think that having won this territory by aggression and use of force they have the right, under the law of the jungle, to retain these territories. But the question is for how long, a generation—may be, but not for all time, because one small people amidst the millions of Arabs cannot hope to escape judgement ultimately.

"The Arabs are prepared to accept the UN resolution of November 1967. The Jews were not satisfied with a pound of flesh but wanted blood as well. In November 1967, the Israeli representative had told the United Nations General Assembly: 'You have chosen repeatedly to meet us in the arena of battles, you cannot refuse to meet us at the negotiating table'.

"That was well said but the question is whether the words carry the meaning or intention on the part of Israel to make peace with honour and justice. If the intention was there, then what was the objection to withdrawing from all the territories occupied, to reach the negotiating table? Or even as a prelude to talk? If Israel agreed to accept resolution 242 and the following resolutions pertaining to Jerusalem, the Arab States would agree to a dialogue that might lead to peace. We could see that Israel by offering to hold a dialogue was in fact talking as if with the

one hand holding a gun and the other the pen offering, so they say, to sign the treaty of peace. No self-respecting people with any pride left in them would accept these terms. The only answer to such offer would be for the Arab nations to prepare for war and this time win or lose; one thing is certain—they will be better prepared, and not repeat the same mistake made by Nasser in 1967.

"For then, according to informed sources, Nasser had no real or serious intention of carrying the fight further than a bluff, hoping thereby to bring Israel to the conference table with less arrogance and more humility.

"The future and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem is the concern no more of the Arabs alone. It is a matter of the deepest and mutual concern of all Muslims throughout the world. It was this widespread emotion and Muslim public opinion which brought up the question of the recovery of Jerusalem time and again and at every meeting of the Muslims.

"This defeat and humiliation which the Arabs suffered at the hands of the Jews, has brought them to a full realisation of their errors. Perhaps they had given much too much time on their Arab thinking and too little on their Muslim comrades. As Muslims, they were strong but as Arabs they are divided. This new awakening gives them fresh hope. They realise as Muslims only will they recover Jerusalem. Alone they will have less chance to succeed. Insofar as the Arabs are concerned, their determination to fight back is made. Admittedly they are not yet ready to start a full scale war but when they strike it will be pretty serious for the Jews and world peace.

"The days of reckoning will surely come for Israel and when they do come, the consequences will be terrible. No American and European help can save them. This is the time for them to think. As I had said in my speech at the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Jeddah —'if they are wise, as they claim to be, then they must make honourable peace and hand back now these territories to their rightful owners'.

"I feel it is the duty of all the peace-loving leaders of the world, of Europe and America to induce them to do so. And if they refuse, then the UN Resolution No. 242 of November 1967 must be forcibly implemented. Unless the UN is prepared to do this, then if war breaks out in the Middle East, UN and the big five will stand condemned in the eyes of the world as being responsible for the war.

What about the mission which the Islamic Conference had decided to send to Pakistan and Bangladesh?

"It could not materialise because the authorities there would not receive a mission from states which have not recognised Bangladesh." Could he himself not have gone personally, after all because his country, Malaysia, had recognised?

Tunku said: "No, because apart from the IC, I am nobody, and I do not represent Malaysia". The fact is, I have been trying all along to help in the alleviation of the situation. I was told that Sheikh Mujib has expressed willingness to receive a delegation from the Secretariat. I was then in Cairo for the meeting on Islamic Bank and I immediately sent a letter through the Indian ambassador. The reply I received was from the Indian P.M. Mrs. Gandhi. It said that since we had not cared during the earlier suffering, Bangladesh authorities do not find themselves in a position to receive us.

"I had visited Dacca, and Islamabad in July 1971. While in Islamabad, I was invited to visit Calcutta and Delhi. But as our mission arrived in Penang to fly to Calcutta (we could not fly directly from Dacca) the Indian High Commissioner in Malaysia explained that the Government of India would not be in a position to receive a delegation from the Islamic Secretariat in view of the strong public resentment against the expulsion of India from the Rabat Summit meeting. India had invited me with full knowledge that I was leading a delegation from the Islamic Secretariat and it was therefore not proper to exclude my colleagues from Iran and Kuwait. I could go to India only as the representative of the IC, so the visit to Calcutta was called off.

"I wrote back telling them that their statement was not true. I did not receive any apology or clarification from the Indian Prime Minister. Later the Indian Ambassador came to me and said they realised it was a mistake.

"When the member states decided at the last Conference to send a mission to Pakistan and Bangladesh, the intention was to be able to help and help in a big way, but we are told that we cannot set our foot there. I had even proposed a meeting between Mr. Bhutto and Sheikh Mujib in Mecca, but with no result. It is really very distressing when one thinks of the sufferings and the problems, and so frustrating to find that we simply cannot get there. Bangladesh is beset with immense problems of food, of relief, and in fact the reconstruction of the whole economy. Then there are continuing reports about the persecution of the non-Bengalis. I can only appeal to the Prime Minister in the name of our religion to stop and prevent cruelties against these people. Added to this, India has handed Pakistani prisoners to be tried for war crimes. The unfortunate result is that both countries are drifting apart, drifting towards the Communist camps.

"The other day I received a letter from an organisation in Dacca calling itself 'Society for the Relief of Bengalis Abroad'. It invites attention to the 'plight' of the Bengalis in Pakistan and claims that Bengali girls are being sold in the Arabian slave markets. This is a very wild statement. To the best of my knowledge I know

of no slave or slave market of any kind in any Arab country. It is absolutely illegal. If people make such irresponsible statements, regardless of facts, one does not know how to trust or help them. In our anxiety and enthusiasm to help we cannot help those who live to profit from the misery of people.

"So here is a situation of sympathy and yet of utter helplessness. We beg to be allowed to go, but they say 'no don't come, you recognise us first'. But you don't quarrel for recognition when people are starving. This is not the way to treat the countries that went out of their way to help. It is bound to offend the Muslim states. Being prevented from reaching Shaikh Mujib would lend credence to feelings that Bangladesh is not an independent entity.

This is one part of the story. In Pakistan, I am told, there is great feeling of anger against me because Malaysia has recognised Bangladesh and probably because I mentioned the name of Bangladesh in my report to the last Conference. A Pakistani press correspondent came to argue it out with me even to the point of rudeness.

"I cannot help feeling that the trouble in that sub-continent is far from ended. So God help us."

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