

A Russian at the OIC summit



Russian President Vladimir Putin.

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin did not look out of place attending the recent Organisation of Islamic Conference summit in Kuala Lumpur, in the company of leaders from 57 Muslim nations. He was an invitee but Orthodox Christian Russia could as well be a permanent observer. When lobbying the Muslim world, Putin always points out that Russia has 20 million Muslims, good for a respectable placing in the Islamic league table. Then again, the long civil war in Russia's rebel Muslim republic of Chechnya has been a source of unease to OIC members, although not to the extent that Palestine is and Bosnia had been. He has blunted US criticism over Chechnya, fortuitously in the wake of 11 September, by quickly lining up with the USA in the campaign against organised terror. This is unspoken *quid pro quo*. He means to also gain the OIC's forbearance, if he can. He has forged links with Malaysia, current chair of the OIC and the Non-Aligned Movement. This was sealed in the US\$900 million deal to supply Malaysia with 18 Sukhoi fighters. More arms sales in Asia beckon.

Mr Putin's foreign-policy game plan is emerging: to put some distance between his proud land and the USA, to which he had turned for a form of validation after he took over a weakened Russia from President Boris Yeltsin. While the USA is unchanged as the primary diplomatic focus, not least because of US agitation to push Nato's frontiers to Russia's doorstep, a revitalised Russia wants to make its presence felt globally again. Reaching out to the Islamic world in this interplay of forces is not a new strategy, as Russian influence in the Arab-Muslim world (Iraq and Iran especially) dates back to Soviet days. What it does show is that Mr Putin has gained considerably in strategic breadth - partly because the shifting balance of power in the oil trade has made his country indispensable, partly due to the reversals the USA has suffered in world estimation for the exercise of its power. The USA is buying Russian oil for the first time. It may have passed unnoticed that US oil supply is getting less assured. There is tension between Washington and the Saudi monarchy over troublesome questions of terrorist support, and open conflict with the Hugo Chavez government in Venezuela, a major exporter. But oil politics has been swirling with geopolitical significance. Not only is Russian oil fetching a premium in non-trade terms, but Moscow is also carving out a niche for itself in North Asia via a pipeline deal being negotiated with China and Japan, and by being engaged in the North Korea peace process.

Russia before Mr Putin had been caricatured as a noble old house in generational decline. There were experts prepared to declare that the rump of the old USSR - some rump! some size! - had become irrelevant. Any nation with a nuclear arsenal of that size and variety and a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council could never be written off. It is no idle process trying to imagine how a China awakened and a Russia energised can challenge American pre-eminence. Mr Putin has shown how far ahead he is on the revival trail. On Iran, a current US fixation, he is purposely ambiguous. On the USA's pre-emptive strike principle, he has countered that "Russia retains the right to act in the same way" if the UN continued to be sidelined in matters of global security. This important statement was conveyed through the Arabic Al-Jazeera TV network when he was at the OIC meeting. Note the setting. Mr Putin is saying, "Watch us - Russia is back".

— The Straits Times, Singapore.

OCT 2003

Putrajaya polemics

But OIC backs out of serious issues

If spokesmen and leaders at the OIC summit at Putrajaya in Malaysia are to be believed, the clash of civilisations is here. To go by the remarks of Malaysian prime minister and host to the conference Mahathir Mohammed, which came in for a standing ovation from his audience, Jews rule the world and Muslims are being targeted everywhere. Quite frankly, such rhetoric is no different in tenor from what Bal Thackeray tells his followers, and Kuala Lumpur had to backtrack after outrage poured in from Western capitals. Despite such an inflammatory outburst, the OIC had to pipe down as far as substantive issues are concerned — for example, it had to admit the American appointed governing council of Iraq as being the authentic representative of Iraqis. India, however, appears to have come in handy as a convenient soft target — the OIC secretary-general's remarks on Kashmir were blatantly partisan. In line with Islamabad's language he called for the right to self-determination for Kashmiris, and for an OIC delegation to visit and ascertain conditions in the "Indian-controlled part" of the state.

One could legitimately query how many member states of the OIC allow self-determination to their citizens? And why not investigate conditions in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, apropos of which JKLF representative Shabir Choudhry — skeptics please note that Choudhry is no friend of India — complained to a UN human rights session that life for two million people in Kashmir's northern areas was hell because Pakistan treated the region as an "occupied land", and "no opportunity is given to the people even to express their grievances"? If the argument is that the OIC will not interfere in Pakistan because it is a Muslim state then that simply validates the clash of civilisations thesis. It would be better for it to take on board what Kofi Annan had to tell the conference, that political reform, education and development offer the only hope of a better future. Delhi could tell the OIC that it will consider OIC resolutions, once the OIC admits it into the latter's inner councils. Delhi could point out that Thailand, which has a small Muslim minority, has observer status, while India, which has the second highest number of Muslims in the world, has been kept out. Once inside, it could effectively blunt Islamabad's arguments before anti-Indian resolutions are passed, besides invoking the non-interference clause among member states to deny Islamabad the only international forum that takes seriously its claims on Kashmir nowadays.

The irony that's OIC

Set up to promote the welfare of Muslims, it has probably done more harm than good

IT is doubtful if the heads of 57 countries that constitute the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Malaysia recognise the contradictions that mark its very role and functions. This perhaps became poignantly visible at the extraordinary summit meeting held in Qatar earlier this year. Chaired by Qatar, that summit "totally rejected" the impending US invasion of Iraq. This, even while Qatar provided the facilities for launching that invasion. Other OIC countries actively supported the war. The OIC, set up ostensibly to promote the collective welfare of Muslims across the world, has probably done more harm to their cause during the 35 years of its existence by mixing up national interests with international activism in the name of religion. That a country like India, with a Muslim population higher than that of half the OIC states combined, is outside this grouping itself reflects upon its legitimacy to speak on behalf of Muslim welfare.

But the core issues that the OIC aims to project are common to all developing countries. In all respects — except one — the OIC reflects the concerns, interests and functioning of the non-aligned group of developing countries. Most of these issues grow out of under-development and the imbalance in economic and social conditions among people within and among countries that had essentially lost

out during the two centuries when the industrialised nations developed at the cost of the nations they colonised. The difference is that the OIC seeks to pursue the promotion of these interests with the parochial, religion-based framework as compared to the secular approach of the non-aligned movement.

The OIC has frequently expressed concerns about the plight of Muslims across the world. Its secretary-general last Monday warned about the "unprecedented" dangers confronting Muslims, who he believes are accused of terrorism and considered with suspicion abroad. But most of the members of the OIC do not allow freedom of choice to their own Muslim populations and few have a democratic political system in place. The OIC, contrary to what the world is deeply concerned about, has not taken a clear stand against terrorism in spite of the serious threat faced by its own members as the bombings in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the Shia-Sunni killing fields of Pakistan symbolise. Some have promoted violent jihad, within and outside their countries; and yet most have done little by way of education, health and employment opportunities for their own people. Nowhere are the contradictions more notable than in Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam and where parochial elite interests over-rule the interests of the people.

OIC toes Pak line on Kashmir

Press Trust of India

PUTRAJAYA (Malaysia), Oct. 16. — Raking up the Kashmir issue at the opening of the OIC summit here, the group's secretary general Mr Abdelouahed Belkeziz today toed Pakistan's line and talked about the right to "self determination" for Kashmiris and urged India to allow its delegation to "inspect condition in the Indian-controlled part" of the state.

Addressing the summit of the 57-member grouping, attended also by Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Mr Belkeziz, however, noted with satisfaction the marked improvement in Indo-Pak ties following resumption of diplomatic relations.

"We hope this would help reach a lasting solution to J&K conflict so as to enable Kashmiris to exercise their right to self determination and ward off the spectre of war... which would jeopardise the entire South Asia," he said. De-

Not dying to have talks: Pervez

PUTRAJAYA (Malaysia), Oct. 16. — Gen. Pervez Musharraf today said he was ready to meet Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee "anytime, anywhere" but was not "dying" for it. "You can't clap with one hand. I want to (have talks). You ask your Prime Minister," the Pakistani President said when asked if there would be an opportunity for the two to have talks during the Saarc summit. Is he ready for yet another summit with India? The general said: "Yes, of course, any time... anywhere". He iterated that any bilateral talks must include Kashmir. — PTI

scribing PoK as "Jammu and Kashmir," he applauded Islamabad for allowing an OIC delegation to visit there and expressed the hope that India too would permit an "inspection of the Indian-controlled part of J&K."

An OIC contact group has called for a peaceful settlement of the issue in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and the Simla Agreement. Heads of the five countries constituting the group met today to finalise a declaration on the issue.

Musharraf: Gen. Pervez

Musharraf too raked up Kashmir, saying the "plight" of the people there was a "core Islamic cause" and asserted that his country would never submit to Indian military "coercion or blackmail". The Pakistani President stuck to his oft-repeated stand on the right to "self-determination" for the J&K people.

The Russian President told Gen. Pervez Musharraf that India and Pakistan should "mutually resolve" all outstanding problems, including J&K. Mr Vladimir Putin is attending the OIC summit as a guest.

Mahathir spews venom at Jews

PUTRAJAYA, Oct. 16. — The OIC summit has urged Muslims to draw on their strength of 1.3 billion against "the enemies of Islam, a few million Jews".

Opening the 10th session of the summit today, chairman and Malaysian Prime Minister Mr Mahathir Mohamad, considered a moderate, said the Muslim nations had been unable to prevent Jews from dominating the world. "The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million, but today the Jews rule the world by proxy... We're up against a people who think. They survived 2,000 years of pogroms not by hitting back but by thinking... They invented Socialism, Communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so that they can enjoy equal rights with others. With these they, this tiny community, have become a world power." — The Star/ANN

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Musharraf rakes up Kashmir at OIC meet

By P.S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, OCT. 16. Conflicting notes were struck on the Kashmir issue at the 10th summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) at Putrajaya in Malaysia today.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the summit, the OIC Secretary-General, Abdelouahed Belkeziz, sounded a positive chord by expressing "satisfaction" over the "marked improvement in India-Pakistan ties following the [recent] resumption of [full] diplomatic relations and [following] the easing of tension between the

two countries".

Only a few days ago, at a summit-preparatory meeting, he had cited the Kashmir issue alongside several other concerns of the OIC.

However, the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, told the plenary session that the Kashmir issue was still a "core Islamic cause". He reportedly told the other Islamic leaders that Pakistan would not submit to India's "coercion or blackmail".

While Gen. Musharraf's latest comments had a familiar tone, Mr. Belkeziz hoped that the marked improvement in India-Pakistan ties "would help [those

concerned] reach a lasting solution to the Jammu and Kashmir conflict". The objective, he felt, should be that of enabling the Kashmiri people to "exercise their right to self-determination". Another related objective was to "ward off the spectre of war between India and Pakistan".

The summit host and Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, did not refer to the Kashmir issue in his keynote address. The current situation in Iraq and the fundamental Palestine question dominated the OIC agenda.

OIC wants key UN role in Iraq

Putrajaya (Malaysia), October 14

FOREIGN MINISTERS of Muslim nations ON Tuesday drafted a resolution for the OIC summit calling for the UN to take the lead role in forming Iraq's next government and for US-led forces to withdraw.

Their position was at odds with Monday night's US draft resolution at the UN Security Council which gives the task of designing Iraq's future political institutions to a combination of the US-backed Iraqi Provisional Governing Council, the US-led occupation authority and a UN representative. Those three would be required to set, by December 15, a timetable for a constitution and elections.

"We have always expressed our readiness that as the Iraqi Governing Council we will be able to provide, to meet those deadlines," the council's Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said. "A great deal depends on the security situation ... unless this is improved, it will be difficult to carry out any further political steps."

OIC foreign ministers pressing to inject a deadline for the withdrawal of US-led forces from Iraq among the resolutions for OIC leaders to consider at the summit starting on Thursday, were persuaded by the Iraqi delegation to drop the idea. "We want a transfer of authority as soon as possible. We as Iraqis are very keen to regain our sovereignty and independence as quickly as possible, as practically as possible," Zebari said.

Turkey, the only Muslim country to offer to send troops to help the U.S.-led

Baghdad blast

A CAR bomb exploded Tuesday at the gates of the Turkish embassy, killing two people including the driver and injuring ten others, witnesses and US soldiers said. Turkish TV said two embassy officials were hurt.

Witnesses said the car tried to ram through the gates of the embassy and suddenly exploded. US troops and Iraqi police sealed off the area. The blast comes two days after a powerful car bomb exploded at the Baghdad Hotel, home to US officials and members of the Governing Council, killing nine.

Reuters, Baghdad

forces stabilise Iraq, said its mission would last no longer than a year.

The Governing Council opposes the involvement of troops from neighbouring countries such as Turkey, as it fears they could take advantage of their country's vulnerability.

But Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul insisted Ankara's intentions were honourable. "We will not be part of the occupation. We will not play any role to extend part of the occupation. On contrary, we will reduce it," Gul said. "The timetable is one year. So what we are saying is that Iraq is for Iraqis."

Guardian and Reuters

Musharraf keen on taking centre-stage at OIC summit

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, OCT. 13. The Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, is leaving for Kuala Lumpur tomorrow to participate in the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). He intends to emerge there as a new icon of the Muslim world, in the post-September 11 scenario, with his thesis of 'enlightened moderation'. Kashmir would also feature prominently in his address and engagements.

His keenness to take centre-stage of the OIC summit was evident here last week when he chose to invite Islamabad-based correspondents of Muslim countries for an interactive session on his ideas of the changed world realities and the message he intended to take to Kuala Lumpur.

Gen. Musharraf had been talking on the theme in vague terms since September 11 but it was articulated in concrete terms as 'enlightened moderation' just before his visit to New York last month to participate in the United Nations General Assembly session.

He did dwell at length on the subject at the U.N. "I believe the way forward is to adopt a two-pronged strategy, a double pincer to build harmony, promote moderation, oppose extremism and ensure justice. I call this strategy, the strategy of enlightened moderation," he told the U.N. General Assembly.

Gen. Musharraf told the U.N. that Muslim nations must assume responsibility for internal reform and renewal. He said that they were at the crossroads and must eschew extremism and confrontation.

However, the critics of Gen. Musharraf are of the view that he is not the best qualified candidate from the Muslim world to preach enlightened moderation. The biggest handicap of him is that he represents the institution of Army and is the President of Pakistan by virtue of that position. The taunt by Pakistan's opposition parties that Gen. Musharraf was qualified only to address the U.N. General Assembly and not the Pakistan Nation Assembly best illustrated the opposition he faces on the domestic front.

14 OCT 2003

Leader calls for eviction of U.S. forces from Iraq

PUTRAJAYA (MALAYSIA), OCT. 11. The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) today called for the "eviction of foreign forces" from Iraq and blamed Israel for the worsening situation in Palestine.

"The United Nations should take over the administration of Iraqi affairs in accordance with a clear and short timetable," the Secretary-General of the organisation, Abdelouahed Belkeziz, said in his opening speech to the OIC's 10th Summit, and its first full summit since the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the U.S.

Mr. Belkeziz said the U.S.-led forces should leave Iraq and the U.N. should administer Iraqi affairs as prelude to the restoration of Iraq's independence, and to the rebuilding of what has been destroyed over the past 20 years. "As I speak we are still under the strain of extremely difficult challenges and unprecedented threats to our countries' sovereignty, security and courses," the OIC Secretary-General, who steps down next year, said. He said the Islamic world has been "in the face of a storm" in the three years since the last summit of the 57-member organisation held in 2000 and urged "a clear Islamic commitment to address the situation with a view to salvaging Iraq and helping its people."

Top priority should go to "the eviction of foreign forces from Iraq, allowing the United Nations to administer Iraqi affairs (as a) prelude to restoration of Iraq's independence, and to the rebuilding of what has been destroyed over the past 20 years, all in accordance with a clear

and short timetable," he said.

Senior officials opened discussions with a prayer on Saturday in Malaysia's sparkling new administrative capital, Putrajaya. They will lay out positions for their Foreign Ministers and national leaders to consider later in the week, ranging from Israel's air strike on Syria to the battle between Israeli troops and Palestinian fighters in the Gaza Strip.

But Iraq is expected to take centre stage, with pre-war divisions between Muslim countries over the U.S.-led invasion still raw.

Host Malaysia, a moderate, prosperous Southeast Asian country led by the blunt-spoken Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, had attempted to keep the U.S.-picked Iraqi Governing Council from taking the seat formerly held by Saddam Hussein's government, viewing the Council as puppets.

But Arab nations — the real power in the Islamic world, many of which allowed American troops to attack Iraq from their soil — prevailed upon Malaysia to accept the Council, which has already been admitted to the Arab League.

Malaysia has said that Muslim states should not heed U.S. calls to send peacekeepers to Iraq unless the United Nations takes control of such operations.

Tahsin Burcuoglu, head of Turkey's delegation, said his country was assuming its neighbourly responsibility by deciding to send troops to Iraq and suggested that countries that wait for U.N. cover that may never materialise were satisfied with doing nothing. — AP

India denied berth at OIC

Stateman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 9. — It is somewhat ironic that India, the country with the second largest population of Muslims in the world, (that make up around 12 per cent of the population) is not given even “observer” status at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), while Thailand, with a miniscule Islamic minority, is accorded that status.

And at the forthcoming OIC summit, scheduled to be held at Kuala Lumpur between 16 and 18 October, Russia (plagued by dissent in Islamic Chechnya) will join the list of ‘observers’ to the 57-member organisation that was founded in 1969 to “defend the honour, dignity and faith of the Muslims.” One reason, according to officials, is that India has never applied for membership or sought ‘observer’ status in the overtly religious body. But, in a body where decisions are made by ‘consensus of a chosen few’, a senior official said, Pakistan has “consistently and effectively” quashed any suggestion of India coming on board.

At the last summit, in Khartoum in 2000, with the Chairman, Sudan, favourably inclined, Qatar had suggested India be made an observer, but was vocally turned down by Pakistan.

Even ‘friends’ like Iran and Indonesia tend to “go with the crowd”, preferring not to “stick out their necks” for an issue that does not personally affect them, officials said.

“The OIC has turned into an India-bashing forum,” a senior official said, where “Pakistan routinely vents its ire against this country.” This time around, MEA officials are expecting resolutions ‘censuring’ India for the Gujarat riots, besides “the usual diatribe” on Jammu and Kashmir.

More bad news for India comes in the form of the only prospective candidate for the Secretary-General’s post, which falls vacant in mid-2004. Bangladesh has proposed the name of Salauddin Qadir Chowdhary, to take over from the present SG, Dr Abdelouahed Belkeziz of Morocco.

Hand-picked by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, Mr Chowdhary (who has been accused by the opposition Awami League of murder and other crimes during the 1971 war) has had his candidature endorsed by Saudi Arabia. There have been suggestions, denied by Malaysia, that Dr Mahathir Mohammed, who steps down as Malaysian Prime Minister this month, may offer himself as a candidate for the secretary-generalship.

Pak spiked India entry in OIC

Agencies
Islamabad, May 26

HT-5 27/5

THE ORGANISATION of Islamic Conference (OIC) would have admitted India as a full member last year but for Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's threat to pull out of the grouping, *The News* reported on Monday.

In doing so, Musharraf "prevented what would have been an unprecedented foreign policy disaster for Pakistan", the newspaper said, quoting a well-placed Foreign Ministry official.

It said the OIC foreign ministers, at their 29th session in Khartoum, Sudan, in June 2002 began discussing the possibility of admitting India as a member of the OIC.

"Several Arab countries agreed to the proposal and were ready to admit India,"

FIGHTING INDIA ABROAD

- OIC foreign ministers, at their 29th session in Khartoum in June 2002 were toying with the possibility of admitting India as a member of the OIC, says a report in *The News*
- Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, however, scuttled the possibility by threatening to pull out of the grouping
- In fact Pakistan went on the offensive and managed to have the OIC pass a resolution, condemning the flagrant human rights violations in ... J&K, an official quoted in the report said



ia," the official was quoted as saying. He, however, refused to name these countries, contending it would be "undiplomatic" to do so.

"Seeing the situation, Nisar Memon, who as minister for Information of the then military regime was representing Pakistan at

the conference in the absence of the Foreign Minister, rang up Musharraf in Islamabad," the official said.

It was well past midnight when Musharraf to the call, *The News* said. "Memon told Musharraf that a formal resolution was being passed the next day rec-

ommending the admission of India to OIC as it had the world's (second) highest population of Muslims and (he) sought guidance.

"Musharraf immediately asked Memon to contact the OIC secretary-general as well as the key Arab states favouring the move and convey to them that if a resolution was passed, Pakistan would immediately withdraw from OIC," *The News* quoted the official.

"President Musharraf authorised Memon to hold an immediate press conference to give a matching response to the concerned quarters if Pakistan's warning against admitting India went unheeded and to announce Pakistan's withdrawal from OIC," he added.

"The warning worked and Pakistan managed to scuttle the move," the official said.

27 MAY 2003