

The Makkah Declaration: rhetoric and reality

The Makkah conclave produced a declaration that is strong on sentiment and exhortation, and less so on specifics. ✓ 15/12/05 19/12/05

Hamid Ansari

KING ABDULLAH bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia is to be complimented for his vision and initiative. The vision that something was seriously amiss within the comity of Muslim nations, and the initiative to call them together in an extraordinary summit of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) to cogitate on the seriousness of the situation and to come forth with meaningful remedies. A few months earlier, he had called together intellectuals and publicists from Muslim countries and communities to seek their views on the Muslim condition.

The Makkah conclave was well attended by kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers of countries that are members of the OIC. It produced a declaration that is strong on sentiment and exhortation, and less so on specifics. It does nevertheless speak of Joint Islamic Action and of a 10-year Programme of Action aimed at eradication of illiteracy, diseases and epidemics, and poverty.

The backdrop to the meeting (December 7-8) and the declaration is the Islamophobia that has of late come to characterise the Western world's perception of Islam and Muslims. There is also a propensity to aggregate and simplify diverse happenings arising out of a multiplicity of causes.

Surprisingly, the declaration tends to accept such aggregation and repeatedly underline the need to counter and combat

terrorism and extremism.

The declaration bemoans the Muslim condition: "we find ourselves today at an age of muddled concepts, misguided values and pervasive ignorance." The last is evident and quantified; the other two however need to be amplified. What are these muddled and misguided concepts and values? Who put them in place? Who sustained them? Who can make these judgments of right and wrong?

In Islamic jurisprudence, Muslims are enjoined to obey God and those in rightful authority. Conversely, it is the duty of those in authority to provide rightful guidance. Is this then an admission of failure? What implications might it have for the legitimacy of these authorities?

The Makkah Document refers to "true Islam" and its "original principles and values." It should have been simple for the gathering of leaders to spell these out. Why was it eschewed?

Hard questions emanate from the assertion that "our conscience throbs synchronously with the hearts and minds of the *Ummah*" and is therefore "only too aware of the political, developmental, social, cultural and educational challenges." Would Muslim masses in OIC lands simply be generous enough to forgive failures of governance of this magnitude?

The final communiqué of the summit amplifies some of the points in the Declaration. It "condemns terrorism in all its forms and

manifestations, rejects any justification for it." It lends support to the measures proposed by the counter-terrorism conference in Riyadh earlier this year.

Two practical suggestions, relating to the emphasis on reform of educational curricula and on a measure of control on the issue of *fatwas*, hold out hope for meaningful correctives.

Selective reference

The communiqué is selective in its traditional reference to "Muslim issues." Palestine, Iraq, Cyprus, and Jammu and Kashmir find a mention. Each of these sections reflects the OIC practice of adopting the formulation suggested by the principal advocate. On Iraq, prudence and the consensus requirement necessitated that the treatment meted out to an OIC-member – invasion and occupation – be overlooked in favour of a bland support to the recent Arab League initiative.

In a similar vein the paragraph on J&K is out of touch with ground reality, even as perceived by the President of Pakistan.

The two documents make evident the real purpose of the extraordinary summit: to propel OIC-member states to take an unambiguous position in their condemnation of terrorism and influence public perceptions accordingly.

The conference agenda, in fact, was set by the Bush-Abdullah Joint Statement of April

25, 2005, in which Saudi Arabia called "on all those who teach and propagate the Islamic faith to adhere strictly to the Islamic message of peace, moderation and tolerance; and reject that which deviates from those principles."

Western discourse on Muslim societies has tended to focus on the so-called battle for the Muslim mind. Muslim rulers now seem to have joined the chorus. Both conventionally overlook the historical development of half a century. They are hesitant to acknowledge that Islamism in some form or shape is now a firmly-rooted factor in Arab and Islamic political life, will be a component of any democratic transition that may set in, and may not of necessity be an impediment to modernity.

In the Arab world, news of the Makkah Summit was superseded by the electoral happenings in Egypt and the occupation-induced anarchy in Iraq. The problems would evidently lie in the detail.

At the end of the conference, the Saudi Foreign Minister summed up the position: "It is now up to every Muslim government to implement the measures, God willing."

Poet Firdausi would have summed up the outcome thus: "a meeting was convened for consultations; they met, discussed, and dispersed!"

(M.H. Ansari is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.)

Attacks against Islamic values: OIC

Jakarta Post/ANN

JEDDAH, Oct. 2. — The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) denounced today the deadly bombings on the Indonesian resort island of Bali as “terrorist acts” which contradict Islamic teachings.

The Bali attacks were “terrorist acts which totally contradict the teachings of Islam and harm Islamic values which call for tolerance and coexistence,” said an OIC statement issued at its headquarters in the Red Sea city of Jeddah. OIC secretary general, Mr Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu pledged the

57-member Islamic body's “solidarity” with Indonesia “against these terrorist operations which do not only kill innocent civilians but also directly harm the image of Islam.” At least 26 people were killed and more than 100 were injured when several bombs exploded yesterday evening in Bali.

Mahathir slams blasts

The deadly bombings on Indonesia's Bali island will set back efforts by Muslims to correct misperceptions that they support terrorism, Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mr Mahathir Mohamad said today, adds an AP

report. “People will perceive Muslims as being very bad people, but that is not Islam at all,” said Mr Mahathir, one of the most respected figures in the Islamic world.

Muslim image tarnished, says Shaukat Aziz

Terrorist acts by Muslim extremists will not win support for their cause but will only tarnish the religion's image, Pakistan's Prime Minister said today, a day after suspected Islamic suicide bombers killed at least 26 people in the deadly Bali blasts adds an AP report.

Pak differs with OIC on UNSC expansion

Press Trust of India

Gaddafi seeks African unity

ISLAMABAD, July 4. — Pakistan is not in favour of the proposal of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to seek separate permanent seat for the Muslim world in the UNSC because it believed such a move had no chance of success in the present system of the global body, the country's foreign minister said today.

Clarifying his remarks made in Lahore yesterday during which he said Pakistan did not support the OIC demand to secure a permanent seat on the UNSC as people of other faiths would also make similar demands, Mr Khurshid M Kasuri said UN system is based on geographical considerations and any proposal on religious lines would have no chance of success.

Pakistan's position on the merits of "Uniting For Consensus" approach was endorsed by other Member States of OIC during the recent Sana meet of its foreign ministers in Yemen.

Under this scheme, Asia would get five and Africa

SIRTE, (Libya) July 4.— Amid global calls to combat poverty in Africa, Libyan leader Col Moammar Gaddafi called on African nations to stop "begging" during the opening of an African summit attended by more than 50 leaders from this crisis-wracked continent, today. Mr Gaddafi also urged African countries to overcome past failures during a typically rambling speech that lasted more than 30 minutes, which received muted applause from leaders of African states. "Pleading to the G-8 to lift debts won't make a future for Africa," he said wearing his traditional African dress while praising Africa's natural resources and treasures. — AP

six seats, he said. Pakistan is opposed to the bid by G-4 countries comprising India, Germany, Japan and Brazil to get the UN permanent member seat.

Pakistan, like other countries in the Uniting for Consensus group, feels that it is up to the regions to evolve a flexible policy without compromising the principle of accountability.

Separatists sending delegates to OIC meet

Shujaat Bukhari

19
25/6

SRINAGAR: The Kashmir separatist leaders invited for the Foreign Ministers summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) at Sana, the capital of Yemen, are sending representatives in Pakistan to the meet. Hard-line Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Geelani has been sidelined ostensibly on the Pakistan Government's advice.

The chairman of the moderate faction of the Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, has deputed a three-member team comprising Ashraf Saraf, Yusuf Naseem and Fayaz Naqshbandi. Though the Mirwaiz has an Indian passport and goes out to attend conferences on Kashmir, this time he has chosen to send a delegation. He said that he had engagements here.

Democratic Freedom Party president Shabir Ahmed Shah has also given his mandate to his Muzaffarabad-based lieutenant Mehmood Ahmed Sagar. A former Peoples League leader, he migrated to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and is involved in "running [the] Kashmir movement."

Mr. Shah who was refused permission to visit PoK with the Hurriyat delegation apparently on mentioning his nationality as "Kashmiri," said that he may not be given travel documents.

"Paucity of time"

Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front chairman Yasin Malik has nominated his Islamabad-based associate Altaf Qadiri. "Mr. Malik is not in a position to attend because of preoccupations and paucity of time," a JKLF spokesman said here.

However, sources said the Government was not in favour of another high profile visit of Hurriyat leaders outside the country, due to the controversy that erupted over their recent visit to Pakistan.

The visit was seen as a violation of understanding between India and Pakistan over the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service. The former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is said to have played a major role in the rethink on the free movement of the separatist leaders.