

University urged to uplift image of Islam

By Adlin M. Zabri

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIU) should fight for and uplift the image of Islam which is low in the eyes of the world, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister added that the IIU, as an Islamic university, should correct the world's misconception and its shallow knowledge of Islam, Muslim society and its economy.

Speaking at a ceremony to lay the foundation stone for IIU's new campus in Gombak, Dr Mahathir said the potential for IIU to emerge as an international centre of

higher education was much better than other local universities because of its special features and strength.

Among those present were IIU president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is Finance Minister, Education Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and IIU Rector Datuk Dr Abdulhamid Ahmad Abusulayman.

Dr Mahathir said the IIU should attain excellence in specific fields so as to get wider recognition from other universities and the international community.

"The IIU's objective

should be not only to become an institution of higher learning which is recognised and respected by the Islamic world, but also by other world universities in general," he added.

In the context of the rapidly changing global environment, universities needed to offer market-driven programmes which were sensitive to the changes in the surroundings and relevant to the needs of the community.

Dr Mahathir said local universities should be able to adapt themselves to the needs of the market and ensure that their programmes were more relevant and beneficial to the society.

In the efforts to attract international students and in line with the internationalisation of higher education, local institutions should give more attention to issues on a larger context.

"The adjustments which need to be implemented include the content of the programmes, approach in teaching, transfer credit system, counselling and the language used to make it easier to accept international students," Dr Mahathir said.

The shifting of world economic growth to the Pacific region had intensified competition among the newly industrialised countries

(NICs), the Prime Minister added.

All countries had realised the need to invest in human resources development. There were some views that universities were slow to adapt to changes around the world.

"What is worrying is that if the local universities and other educational institutions continue to maintain the mould and thinking of the 1950s to meet the current challenges and those of the year 2020, the opportunity to develop this country into an international centre for higher education will be lost," he said.

In 1988, there were about 75,000 students from Asean

studying outside their countries. Eighty-five per cent of these students were in just seven nations — the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Canada, Japan and France.

However, Dr Mahathir said, changes in the tuition fees policies of these countries, such as requiring foreign students to pay full fees, and the exchange rate factor had compelled governments and parents to find alternative countries to send their children for tertiary education.

Dr Mahathir said strategies could be planned to attract some of these students and contribute to a reverse flow of Asean students.

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