

# Dr M: Give priority to development, material success

By  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Muslim countries like Malaysia must give priority to development and material success if they want to be a force to be reckoned with.

Only through development and progress could Muslims hope to thwart and defend themselves against the oppression and aggression by those with such strength, Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said: "If we are not materialistic how are we to fight those who are? This is the weakness of the Islamic people and that is why they are being pressured everywhere.

"Who can we blame? We cannot offer any assistance but merely watch helplessly as others are being slaughtered."

The Prime Minister said this on his return from attending the Organisation of Islamic Conference summit

in Casablanca and a short working visit to Croatia.

Dr Mahathir, who turned 69 today, was asked to comment on several issues by reporters at the Bunga Tanjung VVIP lounge at the Kuala Lumpur International airport.

On hand to greet him were senior Cabinet Ministers including Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, Law Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, Information Minister Datuk Mohamad Rahmat, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman and Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that when the Government focused its attention on development, there were some quarters who felt that this was not important, and that the Government was being too materialistic.

He was also asked to comment on the fighting in Chechnya where Russian

authorities have sent in troops to quell attempts by the largely Muslim state to break away to become independent.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of the inaction of some Muslim countries which merely watched helplessly as Muslims in other countries were being slaughtered.

Since Muslims could not afford to produce their own weapons, they resorted to buying arms from the enemy in order to defend themselves.

He said: "How do they fight back? They know nothing of making artillery and machineguns, much less about aircraft and submarines.

"We can't do anything. Who are we to blame? Russia? For what? We have only ourselves to blame."

Asked to comment further on Malaysia's offer to OIC members which may be keen to use economic weapons against countries which have dealings with Serbia in the Bosnian conflict, Dr Mahathir said it should be a collective effort, particular-

ly among those with the necessary economic clout.

He was confident that if Malaysia could benefit from such economic leverage, then similar action by OIC countries would prove even more so.

Asked whether any comprehensive settlement of the Bosnian conflict would turn out to be a long drawn out affair like the Palestinian problem, Dr Mahathir said the conflicts appeared similar.

He said: "There is no sincerity. The Serbs have conquered almost 25 per cent of Croatian territory and they want to take over the whole country.

"The Serbs have also carried out ethnic cleansing and regard the territory as their own. So Croatia also has its problems."

Asked to comment on former US President Jimmy Carter's praise of Serbia for its commitment towards a peace process, Dr Mahathir said he could not understand how a country like Serbia could be considered good when it had killed

about 200,000 people.

Asked to comment on the proposal to allow teachers in Category A to take part in politics, the Prime Minister said the Government could consider the proposal.

In the past, teachers had traditionally played an important role in politics but allowing them to participate in politics could make other government officers demanding the same thing.

This could be a problem, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the matter had to be looked at closely, adding that professionalism and politics have to be separated. However, he added that there was currently a lack of professional leaders particularly in the rural areas.

Asked to comment on his trip, the Prime Minister said he was satisfied with what had been achieved and that he managed to visit the motorcycle and car design centres in Europe. He also viewed the new Proton car to be launched in collaboration with French car manufacturer, Citroen, next year.