

10/12/1997

Dr M urges Muslim nations to accept challenges of globalisation

Zainon Ahmad in Teheran

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called on Muslim nations not "to stay out" but to accept the challenges of globalisation in the information age and to adapt themselves to preserve their faith and identity.

Just as the early Muslims had adapted to knowledge and culture around them, he said the present followers of Islam must master the changes now taking place around them not only to preserve their way of life, but to enhance their faith as well.

"If we employed our skills, we will not only survive but we will direct the application of the technologies and the concept," he told the inaugural session of the Eighth Conference of the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

He said Muslim nations must not opt out and retreat like their earlier empires in the face of European expansion, adding that "they lost because they failed to adjust to a changing world and the new knowledge and skills that fuelled these changes."

Dr Mahathir said globalisation and technological revolution were new areas in which Muslim countries were not far behind as many of them were also pioneers and contributors to the new skills and knowledge and new concepts of international relations.

Indeed, he said, Muslims had the opportunity to leap-frog over the Industrial Age into the Information Age and the global world and be at the same level as the others.

Dr Mahathir arrived yesterday for the three-day summit which had adopted "Dignity, Dialogue, and Participation" as its theme.

After his speech, he began his series of bilateral meetings by calling on the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami.

At the beginning of his speech, he told the delegates that even as they were attending the conference, the world was on the threshold of a new Western century and millennium and therefore Muslims should realise the enormous challenges that they had to face.

But he lamented the state of affairs of the Muslim world much of which was often bogged down by fratricidal wars, instability, under-development and poverty.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims quibbled over small things such as how they should look or what they should wear, they fought over minor differences in the expression of their faith.

"We are forever trying to outdo each other in various external manifestations of religious piety, in inventing a new world and more restrictive practices in our desire to exhibit the strength of our faith," he added.

He said the situation was as if Muslims had forgotten that Islam was a religion of peace, of brotherhood and of flexibility where there was much leeway given in order that the religion did not become a burden to the followers.

Dr Mahathir said it was as if the Muslims rejected the bounties of God in this world, including the faculty to think because they often considered that this world was not for them.

"It is not the unthinking enjoyment of life that I refer to - it is the acquisition of knowledge and skills required to contribute to the greatness of Islam, the religion we refer to as Ad-Deen, a way of life.

"And because of all these, we find the ummah trodden and oppressed everywhere and insults thrown at our religion, while we are completely incapable of doing anything to protect and safeguard our honour and the sanctity of Islam."

He said Malaysia realised its own weakness in terms of defence capability and has therefore concentrated on achieving economic independence, believing that it could free itself from being pressured, dictated to and re-colonised.

"Today we are not so sure that that alone is enough.

"The globalisation of the world has changed the whole equation. We may not want to accept the changes. We may want to stay out.

"But there is no way we can do this. One way or another, the process of globalisation, of breaking down borders, will take place and become a fact of life," he said.

(END)