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Dr M: Strive for economic excellence

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight called on Muslim nations to strive for economic excellence as a shield against dominance by external forces.

He said at present many Muslim economies were suffering a setback which resulted in their nations becoming weak and easily suppressed.

To make matters worse, Dr Mahathir said internal disputes among fellow Muslims had led to Muslims living behind closed doors and unable to realise the fruits of modernisation.

"A struggle does not necessarily mean taking up arms, but continuous efforts to strengthen the Muslim faith and to find a peaceful solution.

"The uprising by Muslim militants have resulted in more Muslims being killed by fellow Muslims as compared to the number of Muslims killed by Jews," Dr Mahathir told a charity concert-cum-dinner held in conjunction with the visit of 70 Palestinian children who are on a one-month visit to Malaysia at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The concert themed Palestinians: You're Not Alone was jointly organised by the National Unity and Social Development Ministry and the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute.

Also present were National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, MSRI chairman Dr Alija Gordon and the Beirut-based Beit Atfal As-Samoud (Home of the Children of Steadfast) director Kassem Aina.

The proceeds of RM600,000 which was raised from the charity dinner will be channelled to the MSRI's building fund and the Centre for Abused Women and Children in Palestine.

Referring to Palestine, Dr Mahathir said the reason why many Western countries were turning their backs on the plight of the Palestinians could be traced back "to the fact that they felt sorry for the holocaust committed on Jews during World War II".

"Today, they (Western countries) try to justify their action by finding the Jews a new homeland.

"By right, they should offer their own homeland, and not an alternative in Palestine to the Jews," said Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister pointed out that it was not unusual for Muslims and non-Muslims to live together provided there was tolerance and understanding.

"In Malaysia, the multi-racial society has adapted well and is able to accept Islam as the official religion.

"There is no retaliation and riots among our non-Muslim community ... unlike the situation in Palestine where there is rampant discrimination by the Jews against the Muslims and Christians," added the Prime Minister.

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