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Islamic nations should cooperate: PM

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called on Islamic countries to stop fighting and instead help one another to join the ranks of the world's developed nations.

Economically, there is not a single Islamic country that can be classified as "developed" today. This does not mean that it is an impossible task for them to achieve the status, the Prime Minister said.

"Muslims are not created by Allah to be inferior. If they want to, Muslims can master all the skills and technologies now monopolised by the non-Muslims.

"If they want to, Muslims can govern their countries well and effectively," Dr Mahathir said at the Oxford Islamic Forum on "The Islamic World and Global Cooperation: Preparing for the 21st Century" in Kuala Lumpur.

In a speech that traces the history of the great Islamic empire, Dr Mahathir said Muslim countries - independent, strong and developed - must take their places as members of the world community.

On the challenges ahead, he said Muslims can be a force for human good in the 21st century which promises to be a time of major changes.

In advising Muslims to face the new millennium with a clear vision of what they want to achieve and the role they wish to play, Dr Mahathir said Muslims will be part of the changes whether they like it or not.

The Prime Minister also said Islamic nations can achieve the desired level of development without attempting to come together as an empire, although cooperation in the spirit of the Ummah will be necessary.

They can strengthen the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), for example, and assist members which are in distress, he added.

"But that is as far as they should go. Coordination and cooperation, but no Empire," he stressed.

It is natural for Muslims to yearn for their past greatness, their empire and their dominance over the rest of the world. However, they must know that imperialism is a thing of the past and cannot be resurrected, Dr Mahathir said. "Neither the Muslim nor the British empire, or any empire, can be resurrected," he added.

At the onset of his address, Dr Mahathir said the fact that not all OIC member countries have Muslim majorities and few actually accept Islam as the state religion shows that "Muslims are sufficiently influential to cause the governments of these countries to seek membership in the Islamic community of nations".

There are 56 countries in the OIC and Muslims make up over 1 billion of the world's population.

"But they are far from being a monolithic group... they certainly do not make up one cohesive Islamic civilisation which can pose a meaningful threat to other civilisations or indeed anyone.

"They are too busy fighting and undermining each other to be a threat," Dr Mahathir said.

"There is also not a single Muslim country that can be classified as developed. Some are very wealthy, being well endowed with natural resources, but almost all are lagging behind in modern knowledge, technological skills and, in many instances, effective government.

"In quite a few countries, a state of near-anarchy prevails," he said.

Dr Mahathir said poverty, ignorance and instability have become such a

common feature in the Muslim nations that it is assumed this is a natural consequence of following the teachings of Islam. This is why the world associates Islam with backwardness.

"This angers many Muslims... but the fact remains that Muslim nations are poor, are backward, are weak, are disunited, are dependent on non-Muslims for all kinds of things including their own security and the continued existence of Islam itself.

"With the powerful weapons in the hands of the non-Muslims, it is entirely possible for them to wipe out the Muslims from the face of this earth. It is only by the grace of Allah and His mercy that those whom we labelled as the enemies of Islam have not done so."

And yet, the Prime Minister added: "Muslims have done nothing to help themselves. If at all, they have weakened themselves more and more by their constant feuding among themselves, by their confusing and contradictory interpretations of Islam and by their failure to obey the injunctions to help themselves even as they pray to Allah."

At this point, Dr Mahathir cited a verse from the Quran: "Whatever good happens to thee is from God but whatever evil happens to thee is from thy soul".

He said Islam has always upheld what is right and just. "Islam has never advocated that we should plot or support each other in doing what is wrong. And so, if a Muslim does what is wrong, other Muslims must condemn it.

"And they must condemn (the action) even if the victims are not Muslims," he added.

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