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Mahathir-OIC

MAHATHIR: OIC NOT UP TO EXPECTATION

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will attend the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Tehran next week, said the OIC has not come up to expectations and should do more than it has done to strengthen solidarity of Islamic nations.

He said Islamic countries should sink their differences, show greater tolerance and understanding because Muslims worldwide were beginning to demand just this.

" There is so much the OIC can do now than it has been able to do in the past. Sadly, it has not come up to the expectations of the Ummah (Islamic community)," he said in an interview with Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) in conjunction with the OIC summit from Dec 9-11.

In this respect, Dr Mahathir said a review of the role of the OIC would be welcomed, adding that " I believe it can play a greater role and become a strong organisation."

The OIC is a major forum for Islamic causes and solidarity. Malaysia is one of the 25 founding member countries of the OIC in 1969. Membership has since expanded to 55 countries and its previous focus on political issues has been stretched to cover economic cooperation.

Asked if Malaysia would favour a cut in the budget of the Jeddah-based OIC secretariat, the Prime Minister said: " If you spend money and produce results, we don't mind paying more money. But if you don't produce results, I think it would be a wastage to spend so much."

An annual budget of US\$10.5 million has been set aside for the OIC secretariat, of which Malaysia contributes 3.5 per cent.

He said Malaysia would have to listen to others on this matter.

Asked if he thought the formation of an Islamic Common Market was possible , Dr Mahathir said at the moment was it was not.

" We cannot be sentimental about it. To begin with, the Muslim world must learn to trade among themselves.

" We must try to get our people to understand that in trade, time is money, but there are always delays and bureaucratic hassles. If we cannot trade among ourselves, then how can we have a Common Market...we have to be realistic," he said.

The prime minister also spoke about support by Muslim countries to the Palestinian people to achieve their rights.

He said the only assistance which could be given to the Palestinian cause was by backing them but they must not be divided.

" They have to understand that there are things which are possible and there are things that are not possible in this world. We need to do things which are possible and not what is impossible," he said.

For example, Dr Mahathir said it was not easy for the Palestinians to take back their land (from Israeli occupation) by force.

" We don't even know how to manufacture weapons, which we are using to fight our enemies, so how can they repossess their land by force," he said.

In other words, Dr Mahathir said the big powers would not provide them with the weapons to achieve their struggle and it would be futile to use force.

He said: " We have no choice but to negotiate."

Asked whether certain policies in certain Islamic countries were a

hindrance to the progress of the people, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia always believed that any country should be stable but should also allow opposition views.

" But the opposition must also understand that they cannot destabilise the country in order to achieve their objectives. That can be decided when they are elections."

He said if any government chosen by the people was not allowed to rule due to disturbance from the opposition, the next time the opposition was elected, they would also be disturbed and in the end, there would be no government.

" We believe that once you have chosen the government, you should let it rule properly. If it doesn't rule properly, next time throw it out. That way, Muslim countries can prosper. We want to have stable countries and we will be able to communicate and deal with the countries...we don't change the government now and then," he said.-- BERNAMA

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