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PM: Muslims must enter 21st Century with mission to bring back spiritual values

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Muslims must march into the 21st Century with a sense of purpose of their role and with a mission to bring back spiritual values to the world that is fast becoming Godless and materialistic, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said today.

He said to do that Muslim countries must be independent, strong and developed so as to take their places as members of the world community of nations and their people must remain Muslim and they must uphold Islam.

"The Muslims can be a force for human good in the 21st Century. Far-fetched, perhaps, but not impossible," he said in a keynote address at Oxford Islamic Forum on "The Islamic World and Global Co-operation: Preparing for the 21st Century" at Sunway Lagoon Resort hotel.

The Prime Minister said while it was natural for Muslims to yearn after their past greatness, they must remember that imperialism was a thing of the past.

"All that we can hope to aspire is the development of independent Muslim countries to the level of the developed countries of the world," he said, adding that it could be done as poverty, ignorance and instability was not, as assumed, a natural consequence of following the teachings of Islam.

Dr Mahathir used two words to describe the role of Muslim countries as they move towards the next century - co-ordination and co-operation.

In this respect, the Prime Minister called on Muslim countries to strengthen the Organisation of Islamic Conference and to help members in distress.

He said Muslims could develop their countries to the desired level without attempting to come together as an empire.

They must co-operate with each other as they are members of the Muslim ummah and their loyalty to their own country should not extend to going to war against other Muslim nations purely out of national ambition.

"That is as far as they should go. Co-ordination and co-operation, but no empire," he said.

The three-day symposium is jointly organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia and Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. About 130 local and foreign participants comprising politicians, academicians, corporate leaders, public servants and journalists are taking part.

Among them are Singapore senior Minister of Environment Sidek Saniff, Saudi Arabia Minister of Commerce Osamah Kaffar Faquih, its ambassador to Malaysia Mohammad Hassan Abdul Wali and British High Commissioner David Joseph Mois.

Dr Mahathir who gave his perspective of Islam in the context of today's world situation started off with the OIC, the early history of Islam when it was a world power and the collapse of the Muslim empire, socio-economic development and its role in the next century.

He noted that not a single Muslim country could be classified as developed although several of them were rich with natural resources. He said almost all of them were lagging in modern knowledge and technological skills.

Muslim nations were poor, backward, disunited and were dependent on non-Muslims for many things including security and the continued existence of Islam.

Dr Mahathir said it was possible for Muslim countries to achieve the level of development attained by the developed countries.

He said Muslims could master all the skills and technologies now monopolised by non-Muslims if they wanted to.

"But they must decide to do this, decide that Allah created this world for them too, and that it is their duty to show that Islam is a great religion which can bring greatness to those who profess and practise it."

He said, however, they must be true Muslim fundamentalists that is they must do what is right and reject what is wrong.

"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 Muslims do what is wrong, other Muslims must condemn it. And they must condemn even if the victims are not Muslims," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the 21st century would bring about many changes and Muslims whether they like it or not would be part of it.

"It is better for them to face the new century with their eyes wide open and with a clear vision of what they want to do and the role they wish to play."

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