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PM warns of threats to Islamic faith, identity, way of life

Lokman Mansor in Tehran

TEHERAN, Tues: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned Muslim nations that they risk losing their faith, identity and way of life if they do not rise to the challenges posed by the Information Age and globalisation.

He said the speed and ease of travel and telecommunications, and advances in multimedia technologies, will expose the Muslim community to an onslaught of external influences.

"They can easily undermine our faith or they can push us into self-destructive extremism or into rejection," Dr Mahathir told leaders of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) here.

The summit was earlier inaugurated by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Dr Mahathir said if Muslim nations remain lacking in knowledge in information and multimedia technologies, they will be under constant attack and be forced to retreat all the time. Depend on the powerful, non-Muslim forces for the knowledge would not do.

"If we buy these skills from them, it will be like purchasing defence capabilities. We will not get what will ensure ultimate success in the preservation of our faith and way of life," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the danger is that, even though Muslim nations are not far behind other nations in mastering these skills, they may miss the opportunity to catch up.

"If we fail this time we are going to be so disadvantaged that we will lose hope, become desperate and do the very things which will ensure our defeat and resubjugation," he said.

The Prime Minister said despite being rich in resources, Muslim nations have been unable to put them to good use, to serve and defend Islam and Islamic countries against their enemies.

"Such is the state of our countries that the best of our people migrate and contribute to the wealth of knowledge and skills of the countries of their domicile, often those which are hostile to us," he said.

This is partly due to the lack of facilities in their home countries for these people to apply their considerable talents.

"We should shelve our own quarrels in order to present a united front in the face of the combined threats. We should not be our own enemy. Yet we see in so many Muslim countries fratricidal wars and instabilities which render most of our governments impotent either to develop and compete with our detractors or even to govern effectively," he said.

"As a result Muslim countries remain largely undeveloped and the Muslim ummah poor, unskilled, uneducated and incapable of contributing positively towards the well-being of Muslims, their faith and their countries," Dr Mahathir said.

Describing the Western style and concept of democracy as no better than the feudalistic theocracy of old, the Prime Minister said their ways may be different but the objective and the end result is the same.

"They don't burn people at the stakes now but the economic heat they place under and around their victims is no less searing. It is still recant, submit or be liquidated."

He said systems of government can never be perfect and can never guarantee good governance. A good government ultimately depends on the quality of the people who are entrusted with ruling the country.

"And for the right quality of people we need only revert to the teachings of our Islamic religion, the true teachings, not the teachings which are interpreted to justify what we are doing, right or wrong, good or bad," Dr Mahathir added.

He said if Muslim nations are not sure what is meant by the true teachings of Islam, they need only ask themselves these questions:

"Does Islam advocate war and violence among Muslims, whether as groups, sects or nations? Does Islam advocate oppression of the people by the Government or destabilising and subverting governments through irresponsible acts by the people?

"Does Islam advocate the rejection of a good life in this world or a good life in the hereafter, or does Islam preach hassanah in this world and in the akhirah? Can we really say that it is our religious duty to be poor, without knowledge and skills, incapable of defending ourselves against our enemies, or is it our religious duty to have wealth and knowledge and skills in order to defend the ummah against our detractors, our oppressors?

"Did the Prophet depend on the wealth and the skills of his followers or did the Prophet buy bows and arrows, swords, horses and camels from those whose manifest objective was to make money for themselves, or worse still, to destroy the Muslims and Islam?"

Dr Mahathir said although Muslim nations know the answers to these questions, "at times we still fight each other over minor differences in the expression of our faith".

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

The Prime Minister said the practice of Islam is never rigid. There is always leeway to ensure that Islam does not become a burden to the faithful.

"We seem to want to reject the bounties of Allah in this world, including the faculty to think because we often consider that this world is not for us. And because of all this, we find the ummah trodden under 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."

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