

09 DEC 1997

Mahathir-OIC

STAND UP TO CHALLENGES AND MASTER CHANGES, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

TEHRAN, Dec 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Muslim countries should take up the challenges of the Information Age and the global society concept to preserve their faith and way of life.

He said the speed and ease of travel, telecommunication, multimedia technologies and the spread of information had all rendered Muslims exposed to everything happening around them.

" They can easily undermine our faith or they can push us into self-destructive extremism or into rejection. In the end, the advances in science and technology will engulf us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this during the general debate of the eighth summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) which began today at the Tehran Conference Centre, which was specially built for the purpose.

The gathering of leaders from 55 member countries is the largest to be held in Iran since the 1979 revolution.

Dr Mahathir said: " As much as the early followers of the faith adopted and adapted to life outside the Arabian peninsula and built an empire of the faithful which included peoples and cultures of the non-Arabs in Asia, Africa and Europe, we can, by mastering the changes now taking place, enhance our faith and preserve our way of life."

"If we employ all our skills, we will not only survive but we will direct the application of the technologies and the concepts," said Dr Mahathir, who is attending his third OIC summit.

Stressing that they could not resist the changes, he said, that if Muslims insisted on remaining without knowledge in the new areas, the ummah and the religion would be under constant attack and would be in retreat all the time.

"We may not want to accept the changes. We may want to stay out. But there is no way we can do this," said Dr Mahathir, who was given the honour to be the first speaker during the session.

"One way or another, the process of globalisation, of breaking down borders will take place and become a fact of life," he said.

"Whether we like them or not, they will engulf us as much or much more than the Industrial Revolution did," he said.

Fortunately, he said, Muslims were not far behind their detractors who were as new to the changes as the Muslims were.

This provided the opportunity for the Muslims to leap-frog over the Industrial Age into the Information Age and the global world to be at the same level with others.

However, Dr Mahathir lamented that the Islamic countries were unable to put their rich resources to good use to serve and defend the religion.

This had resulted in the best of their people migrating and contributing to the wealth of knowledge and skills of the countries of their domicile, often those which were hostile to Islam, he said.

"We have no facilities to offer these talented people and the conditions in our countries are unsuitable for the application of the considerable attributes that they possess.

"We are too busy with our petty quarrels to attend to their needs," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia was deeply saddened by the killings of foreigners and Muslims in some Islamic countries.

"They are not in accord with Islam and they really do not help the

cause of Islam.

"We should shelve our own quarrels in order to present a united front in the face of the combined threats against us. We should not be our own enemy," he said.

Yet, he said, many Muslim countries were troubled by fratricidal wars and instabilities making their governments impotent either to develop and compete with their detractors or even to govern effectively.

"Personal quarrels and personal ambitions for power are allowed to disrupt government administration, leaving it incapable of addressing the needs of the people.

"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," he said.

He said the summit, coming on the threshold of "a new Western century and millennium", gave the leaders the opportunity to ponder with renewed urgency and the enormous challenges that they faced.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the present Western-style system and concept of democracy which he said was no better than the feudalistic theocratic states that had preceded them.

"Despite all that, the West claims about the efficacy and fairness of their brand of democracy, it is still far from being a perfect system or even a good system for them or for anyone," he said.

The summit was opened by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and chaired by Iranian president Mohammad Khatami.

Themed "Dignity, Dialogue and Participation", the summit followed a two-day meeting of foreign ministers, who had approved 140 resolutions for the leaders' consideration. -- BERNAMA

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