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Modern-day visionaries can serve as a beacon for the 21st century

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ISLAM came to India in the year 712 when Arab Muslim invaders occupied the north west. In 1001 Sultan Mahmud of Turkey (971-1030) took Islam eastward into the Punjab and beyond.

After the 12th century, the Ghurids of Afghanistan captured Mahmud's Indian empire and build their own empire which became the powerful Sultanate of Delhi until a Mongol invasion in 1398 greatly reduced its powers.

From 1519, Babur the Lion (1453-1530), a Muslim of Mongol extraction crushed what was left of the Delhi Sultanate and in 1526 founded the Mughal empire. His grandson, Akhbar the Great (1542-1605), extended it throughout most of northern India and part of the Deccan.

By 1799 the British East India Company had become the dominant power in India and by 1849, virtually the whole of the Indian subcontinent was under British control. The Muslims, nonetheless, made a last desperate attempt to reassert their former authority and glory but were finally crushed by the British during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 when thousands of Muslims were massacred in Delhi.

By the second half of the 19th century, Indian Muslims had become a sad spectacle of inertia and degeneration steeped in ignorance, conservatism, traditionalism and superstitions. Then came Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) who realised that the key to the upliftment of his fellow Muslims was education in modern science and arts. In 1875 he founded the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh after a visit to the Oxford and Cambridge universities. His plan was to develop the college into a university. His vision was realised in 1920 when the college became the Aligarh Muslim University, the 10th university in India, drawing students from all over India, to attend courses in Arts, Science, Social Sciences, Commerce, Law, Theology, Medicine, Engineering and Technology.

In 1969 the Malays of Malaysia realised that political independence and power alone were not enough. In the aftermath of the May 13 riots, the Government of Tun Abdul Razak introduced the New Economic Policy to create an even playing field in economics for the Malays to compete with the non-Malays.

From 1971 onwards, hundreds of young Malays were sent each year to universities in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Malays have since become captains of industry, bankers, financiers and leaders of the corporate world.

In this context, the fate of the Malays in their own country should be construed alongside with the fate of Muslims in the entire world. In 1977, the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca recommended the establishment of an International Islamic University.

It was becoming evidently clear that the only way the Muslims could meet the challenges of the future was to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills of modern science and technology, economics and the professions in an era of globalisation in addition to being good practising Muslims.

In 1983, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad took the initiative to implement the 1977 Mecca recommendation by establishing the International Islamic University Malaysia with the Government of Malaysia as the founder and co-sponsored by the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

The IIUM operates as a company under the direction of a board of governors consisting of government representatives of Malaysia,

Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, the Maldives, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the OIC. The university has close links with the League of Islamic Universities, the International Association of Universities and the Association of Commonwealth Universities. It has a brand new permanent campus at Gombak in Selangor offering courses in Revealed Knowledge, Human Sciences, Economics and Management, Law, Engineering, Architecture and Post-Graduate Studies; a branch campus for Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing and Science at Kuantan, and a branch campus for Law and Revealed Knowledge at Kuala Terengganu.

The university is truly international with Muslim students from 96 countries reflecting the geographic and cultural diversity of the ummah. The teaching and research staff consists of eminent academicians from the East and the West.

Islam is a religion of peace. Yet today, Muslims continue to kill each other in spite of Quranic injunctions prohibiting such killings. Worse, Muslims get killed by non-Muslims and the rest of the Islamic world hardly reach out to assist their fellow Muslims.

Perhaps in the 21st century, the new generation of Muslims will be motivated by modern-day visionaries like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Tun Abdul Razak and Dr Mahathir for a brighter, peaceful and prosperous future of the ummah.

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