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Dr M: Bring back nationals to help rebuild countries

Farush Khan in Dhaka

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday urged Muslims to rebuild their nations with the help of their nationals abroad with skills and intellect.

He said these people were using their gifts elsewhere as their countries did not provide them with facilities they needed.

"We have to bring them back. We have to create an environment that is attractive to them, conducive for their work.

"Insha Allah (God willing), with their help and our dedication to Islam and the honour of the Muslim ummah (community), we will triumph eventually."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the second summit-level meeting of "Co-operation for Development" or D-8 here.

D-8 is a new economic grouping involving Malaysia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria and Turkey which have a total population of almost 800 million people.

The summit will, among others, deliberate on the progress of projects identified for implementation at the first summit held on June 15, 1997, in Istanbul, Turkey.

Dr Mahathir spoke at length on weaknesses in Muslim countries, emphasising that the D-8 was attempting to cope with a world which had become as threatening as when the Muslim world was under siege.

"We are really ill-prepared to cope with the threats. We really have no time for personal ambitions and petty quarrels."

The Prime Minister said there was a great deal of wealth and potential in Islamic nations which had not been used so far to benefit themselves or other Muslim countries.

"None of us can claim to be a force of consequence in the international arena today. Many of us have been unable to make our nations stable or make progress to match that of the advanced countries of the world, none of which are Muslim."

He said while the rest of the world "seemed to be in the 20th century, the Muslim world was in the 15th century".

"Now they have introduced new ideas and technologies that we are not prepared for and we are seemingly unable to handle."

He said the Muslim world found itself unable to reject new concepts about governments and international relations which advanced countries had introduced.

He said they could not offer their own alternatives either.

"Yet we seem unable to apply these concepts effectively. The concepts of democratic governments have been largely mishandled by us. We enjoy the rights conferred but we do not seem to recognise that along with the rights come the need for responsibility.

"As a result, our governments are seldom stable long enough to make governance effective and beneficial to our countries and peoples."

On globalisation, he said one of the manifestations of this phenomenon was a free flow of capital across borders.

He said the huge wealth some Muslim countries had accumulated from natural resources had not been invested in their own countries.

"Instead we have taken advantage of the free flow of capital to invest in developed countries. Effectively, we have enriched them. But we do not know how to use this investment to influence them.

"They (developed countries) have instead used our money to invest in our countries and then suddenly pull out their investments to destabilise and impoverish us.

"A lot of our money is held hostage abroad and actually used against us."

Dr Mahathir told the leaders and heads of government attending the two-day summit of how Malaysia had experienced one of the effects of globalisation.

Malaysia was relatively prosperous, he said, but suddenly found its wealth diminishing when currency traders depreciated its currency.

"Our initial inability to counter the attacks of the currency traders clearly showed that we had not understood what was meant by globalisation and the consequences of giving up control of our own currency. Learning the lesson has been very costly for us."

The Prime Minister also reminded leaders that currency speculation and stock market raids were just the beginning. "We can be assured that newer interpretations will be made which will open up ways for the exploitation of the poor by the rich."

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