

28/06/2000

Close ranks, OIC urged (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The 56-member nations of the Organisation of Islamic Conference were today urged to close ranks and embrace modern science in the interest of Islam and the ummah or world Muslim community.

In making the call, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said for a strong ummah to emerge and to be able to combat those out to destroy "our values, faith and the remains of our civilisation", Muslim nations must reduce the petty conflicts among them and acquire knowledge especially information technology.

Dr Mahathir said without unity and knowledge, Islamic nations also risked being colonised by rich countries and turned into banana republics where the managers of the plantations are more powerful than the presidents of these countries.

"The solution is with us and between us. We can choose to carry on without petty rivalries or we can together or even separately turn to face the real threat to Islam," he said.

At the same time Islamic nations must also prepare for the challenges and dangers of globalisation, he said when opening the 27th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) at the Palace of the Golden Horses in Seri Kembangan near here.

Dr Mahathir's exhortation to Muslims to embrace technology lent a thematic thread to the first day of the OIC meeting, which later this week will consider a resolution condemning the alleged use of technology by rich countries to dominate poor nations.

About 1,000 delegates from the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) member countries are attending the four-day meeting with the theme "Islam and Globalisation".

The opening ceremony was televised live by Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) to Brunei, Turkey, the Philippines, Iran and the London-based Associated Press Television News beamed it to Europe.

Dr Mahathir, in his seven-page speech, expressed hope that representatives at the conference would recognise the danger and the challenges posed by globalisation and take the first step towards reducing the divisions among the Muslims.

"It was well within their power and capability to promote and defend the cause of Islam and the ummah. If we chose not to, we should not blame others. We, the Muslims, are to blame.

"Allah has given us guidance in the Al-Quran and Hadith. Allah has sent his Prophet Muhammad to unite and set us on the right path.

"But it is we who chose to ignore the words of Allah."

He said the civilisation the Muslims built lasted for many centuries and was greatest in the history of mankind and it seemed it would last forever.

"But the process of world Islamisation was halted because the Muslims began to revert to their pre-Islamic ways.

"They began to quarrel and fight each other, setting up little kingdoms, rejecting their loyalty to Islam in favour of loyalty to their local rulers and states."

Dr Mahathir said they also became engrossed with the interpretations and formulation of Islamic laws and quarrelled over who was right and who was wrong, each trying to outdo the others in their religious fervour.

In the process, the Muslims failed to notice the changes that were

taking place in Europe, changes brought about by the knowledge of Europeans acquired from the Muslims, changes which later led to the Industrial Revolution.

The Prime Minister said that it was quite clear that the Muslims had "learnt nothing" from their past and were far from being brothers. Today we are more divided than ever. Many of our countries are at war with each other.

"And within each country, we are also unable to unite, to set up strong progressive Governments.

"If we practice democracy at all we use Islam to divide rather than to unite and we weaken ourselves and our Governments."

The Muslims were also left behind the rest of the world in the quest for knowledge.

"Knowledge other than Islamic knowledge is condemned by many of us as secular and we are urged to reject them.

"Some of us have to emigrate in order to acquire knowledge and as a result others benefit from the skills our people developed."

Because of this, he said, the Muslims could neither develop their countries, industrialise, nor compete with even the newer developed countries.

He said that by failing to develop the Muslim countries, by failing to defend them and the Muslim people, "we are committing even greater sins which our personal devotion to the daily rituals of our faith will not absolve us".

"In all humility, I would like to claim that Malaysia knows a little more than most other Muslim countries.

"But what we know and what we have experienced have made us wary about the great promises made by the advocates of globalisation."

Touching on Information Technology, Dr Mahathir said the most significant change brought about by IT was the Internet.

However, he said, the Internet was not always being used to disseminate information about knowledge, but also about muck and filth and unmitigated lies spread by people wishing to undermine the development of human society, including the Muslim community.

"You may be surprised to know that 50 per cent of the business transactions on the Internet is about pornography.

"While we Muslims cover up our bodies in pious obedience to our religion, we are being tempted to download the filthiest pictures, still and moving, from the Internet.

"Our morals, those of our children, the future generations are being subverted so that the profession of Islam will become meaningless.

"And we do not know enough about technology or the methods to counter this."

The Prime Minister said the detractors and enemies of the Muslims were not concerned "as to how Muslim we are".

"To them we are all Muslims, their enemies and potential terrorists and they will do their very best to weaken us and in many instances to destroy us.

"It serves their cause to see us quibble over our Islamic credentials and they will encourage the divisions among us and within us."

The enemies will also directly or indirectly support the violent extremists among the Muslims and the orthodox who reject the knowledge and skills with which to defend the Muslims.

Some 400 media representatives and journalists from 24 countries are covering the meeting.

Formed in 1969, the OIC consists of 56 member countries and four observer states, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Thailand, Central African

Republic and the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast).