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Dr M: Economic plans vital

MUSLIM countries could face economic challenges better if they were serious in planning and implementing economic plans, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said they could emulate the economic success of European nations if did so.

"I do not think the ability to plan and to carry them out is a monopoly of the western world and rich countries," he said in reply to a question by a foreign journalist on how Muslim countries can manage their economies following Malaysia's successful handling of the economic downturn in 1997.

"In Malaysia, we have always planned our economy. We have a five-year plan, a 20-year perspective plan and a 30-year vision plan (Vision 2020). We do this so that we can use our resources efficiently," he said during a Press conference after opening the First Conference on Haj Guidance.

Also present were Saudi Arabian Minister of Haj Dr Iyad Ameen Madani, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paduka Abdul Hamid Othman, conference secretary-general Dr Abu Bakar Bageder, Tabung Haji chairman Tan Sri Zainol Mahmood and Tabung Haji chief executive officer Datuk Badroddin Kassim.

The three-day conference attended by some 150 delegates from 51 countries aims to review current haj guidance courses by the countries and exchange ideas on how to improve them.

Dr Mahathir said globalisation was an invention of the very rich countries in the West.

"Of course, they attribute this to the ease of communication and travel. That is why their money, capital and know-how should be invested in the poorer countries in order to enrich them.

"They (the Western countries) would like to go into any country without any restriction and take over the banks and the industries, and they say they will run it more efficiently than us.

"But in the process we would lose our sovereignty, control over our policies and economy. This is why we oppose that aspect of globalisation," Dr Mahathir said.

He said it was suggested that people were the country's capital and not money and since it was a borderless world, people should be allowed to cross borders freely just like capital.

Asked his advice for Muslims in the new millennium, Dr Mahathir replied:

"I believe our religion gives us ample guidance if we follow it."

To another question, he said Muslims had always found excuses to fight and quarrel with each other despite the fact that the religion taught them to be brothers.

The Prime Minister said while Muslims accepted the teaching in theory, they did not practise it.

He said Malaysia was trying to remind itself of the responsibility of caring for other Muslims.

"That is why during the Bosnian massacre, Malaysia was prepared to send our forces there as we felt it is our duty to help our brothers," he said.

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