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'Jihad needed to revive Muslim Civilisation' (HL)

Ahmad A. Talib; Cheah Chor Sooi in London

SPEAKING plainly and clearly, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad painted a not-too-optimistic a picture of the Muslim Civilisation in the 21st century, but quickly pointed out that a turnaround can take place if Muslims the world over "are spiritually ready to face the challenges in a hostile world".

"We want Muslims to be well educated in all the arts and sciences and the technologies, without forgetting their knowledge and the practice of their religion - Islam. We want them to be able to compete and to acquire wealth legitimately.

"We want them to be spiritually ready to face the challenges in a hostile world. We want them not to succumb to emotion but to plan and strategise when faced with challenges...

"We believe that if we can build a rational Muslim nation, skilled in administration, in the sciences and technologies, in trade and industry, politically, socially and religiously, learned in all fields - then we can advance the true cause of Islam.

"This is our jihad," the Prime Minister told his audience of Muslim intellectuals and professionals at the Muslim College here. (Watch out for the full text of the speech in the NST tomorrow.)

The Muslim College offers students graduate studies in many areas such as world religion, Arabic language and literature, theology and philosophy, Islamic jurisprudence, studies in the Quran and Hadis, Western philosophy and Islamic history and civilisation.

Among those in attendance were businessman, lecturers, students and leaders of Muslim associations and organisations.

Conceding that this would take time - decades or centuries even - Dr Mahathir pointed out that the approach he outlined is the one that Malaysian Muslims should take; and that peace and stability are prerequisites for success.

"We had hoped that we would be able in a small way to show Muslims and Muslim countries the path to a Muslim renaissance, a Muslim resurrection. We had hoped that our little success would be acknowledged and recognised and used as a model.

"We still think we can do this. But we are seeing in Malaysia the advance of the kind of intra-Muslim conflict which is likely to derail us.

We are seeing young, educated professionals becoming obsessed by blind hatred of the people who had brought about their upliftment, throwing in their lot with the fanatics, thinking more about a martyr's death and heaven for themselves, rather the peace and recovery of the Muslim ummah and the Muslim civilisation."

Having clearly articulated his vision for a Muslim renaissance, Dr Mahathir ruefully admitted that "it is very difficult" to be optimistic.

He gave his reasons: "I find few Muslims understand reality. They live in a make-believe world where weakness is regarded as strength, where failures as success.

"After 1,400 years, they clearly have failed to understand their really very simple religion, the religion that is not to be a burden to them. And so they will continue to argue and to debate and to disagree on the teachings of their religion, and in disagreeing they will fight and kill each other, subconsciously perhaps doing the work of their detractors and enemies."

He said Muslim nations were still breathless as they try to catch up with the industrialised nations.

Dr Mahathir also drew his audience's attention to the fact that Muslims have many enemies from among the non-Muslims but these are not often the target of the would-be martyrs.

"They have disrupted Muslim Governments, preventing them from making progress towards fully developed States, towards rebuilding the Muslim Civilisation and regaining the glory that was Islam before," he said.

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