

13/11/2000

Technology, economic cooperation vital: PM

Zainul Arifin in Doha

DOHA, Sun: The acquisition of new technology is imperative for Muslim nations to prosper and be stronger, while closer economic cooperations will make them less susceptible to the vagaries of globalisation.

This was the twin message carried by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the 9th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit here, apart of course from the overriding Palestinian issue.

Muslim nations will lose out and fail in its effort to upgrade the status of the Ummah if they do not address the two, he said.

The acquisition of new technology must be seen as a jihad or holy war, as a way to make them better able to adapt to changing times and ensure that they are not dominated and manipulated by the West.

While closer economic cooperation, through what he suggests as Muslim Direct Investment (MDI) to fellow Muslim nations, will make them stronger as a group. members rich in capital must be encouraged to invest in Muslim countries with knowhow and technology but lacking in capital.

Similarly, many of the products now imported into Muslim countries can be sourced from other Muslim countries.

"... a well-planned programme can be developed to promote Muslim Direct Investment in the OIC countries," Dr Mahathir told leaders at the opening of the Summit today.

The OIC groups 56 Islamic nations representing more than a billion people. The Summit is held once every three years, the last being in Iran. Incidentally, Malaysia has offered to host the 10th Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2003.

Petty bickerings and close-mindedness saw Muslims, whose civilisation was once the best in the world, miss the industrial revolution.

"Now we are seeing the Information Age dawning upon the world. And it looks like we are going to miss this revolution too. We are still too busy with our endless squabbles over our (religious interpretation) and our politics," Dr Mahathir said at a meeting with Muslim intellectuals last night on the sidelines of the Summit.

Large numbers of highly-skilled Muslims in information technology (IT) are now living in countries of the Atlantic North because Muslim nations have no place for them.

"And so they are contributing to the body of knowledge and Information Age skills being built up in these countrie, which may probably be used against (Muslim nations).

"They should be brought back and their skills tapped to build the IT capacities of Muslim nations, and the Ummah be empowered and able to handle the challenges of the Information Age.

"This is our real jihad. I believe we have the talents and the capacity to ensure the success of this jihad."

Dr Mahathir also advised Muslim nations not to be too enamoured with globalisation as espoused by the West, which only refers to unfettered market access and level playing fields but did not venture to look into the matter of the size of global players.

"Maybe the quality of our life will improve (with globalisation); maybe we will earn more pay. But we will all be servants of foreigners," he said, if Muslims insist on remaining as spectators.

"We are a billion strong. Every sixth person in this world is a Muslim. The real problem that we face in a globalised world is that we reject the

brotherhood of Islam. While others are uniting and consolidating their strength, we are drifting apart and fragmenting."

At the opening of the Summit today, Dr Mahathir again raised the matter.

"Globalisation, a concept that is more Islamic than nation states, can be a powerful and dynamic force for strengthening Islamic cooperations and accelerating growth and development; but in its present form it poses many risks and challenges.

"Our task is to ensure that its benefits are spread to all and not merely the privileged few."

(END)