

Mahathir urges Muslim nations to be united to face challenges

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DISUNITY and the failure to reach a common stand on certain issues are the reasons why some Muslim countries are not capable of developing to the level of the developed countries of the world, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

As such, according to the Prime Minister, it appears to be no possibility that a Muslim country would emerge as a world power in the foreseeable future, no matter how big it is.

"The Muslim countries missed the industrial revolution completely. Now we are likely to miss the Information Age and the concomitant globalisation too.

"We are simply not prepared for these radical changes in technology and the relation between nations," he said in his keynote address at the official opening of the International Islamic University (IIU) in Gombak yesterday.

Citing globalisation as an instance, the premier said Muslim countries should put up a consolidated effort to accept it and prepare themselves for the challenges.

"Globalisation is rapidly advancing and we are not even a part of the process of interpreting globalisation.

"After the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has been formed, all kinds of subjects, some totally unrelated to trade, are being introduced as issues for trade negotiations between members of the WTO," he said.

Dr Mahathir said only few Muslim countries are conversant with the processes of globalisation as they are disunited in facing the challenges and the negotiations.

"They do not have a common stand. Some are under obligation to the rich and may not oppose the interpretations on globalisation formulated by the rich.

"But once they have committed themselves to the WTO, they will not be able to get out of it. In the end, they will lose control over their countries. They will lose their independence."

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), he said, was once used as an agency for imposing the will of the rich countries on the poor.

"But its reach was limited in a way. The WTO will cover every member. Once a rule is accepted, failure on the part of a member to comply can lead to countervailing measures on the part of the rich and even to trade sanctions," he said.

For example, the Prime Minister said if transparency in Government procurement is adhered to, the locals will

have to compete with powerful international contractors who can outbid their local competition.

In the end, he said the local contractors for Government supplies or construction will all go under while on the other hand, there is no hope for the contractors from poor countries to bid for contracts put out by the respective governments of the rich and powerful nations.

"This is what is in store for the Third World countries and all Muslim countries belong to this group. It looks like we are going to lose out again as the world moves into the Information Age.

"Not only do we not have mastery of Information Technology (IT) but we don't seem to realise that IT and the globalisation that accompanies it will again result on our subjugation," Dr Mahathir said.

In reasoning out the weakness of Muslim countries, the Prime Minister said all this happened when Muslims forsook the true teachings of Islam.

"We say Islam is a way of life when we mean it as a way of death. For we are making no effort to prepare ourselves for life in the 21st century.

"When Islam asks us to acquire knowledge, we say that the knowledge referred to is only religious knowledge. When Islam enjoins upon us to be prepared to put fear in the hearts of our enemies and

to defend ourselves, we ignore the injunction and instead, by our unpreparedness and weakness, we allow the enemy to put fear into our hearts, and to attack and overcome us at will."

All this, he said, happened due to a great deal of confusion among Muslims regarding secularism as they tend to regard anything that is not about the ritualistic expression of Islamic faith, about Islamic laws and Islamic theology as being secular.

"This is rather unfortunate because it tends to make Islam a reclusive religion, incapable of understanding and dealing with anything other than what they perceive as being religious.

"That this should be the perception of Islam is doubly wrong because Islam is not just a faith to be believed in but it is a way of life. Islam should therefore be concerned with everything that is done in daily life, whether as an individual or as a community."

Dr Mahathir also said that Muslims must not play God as how the western science

has progressed to the extent of cloning humans. However, they have a need to understand and to be able to have the same capability.

"We must have this not because we have to know how to counter the evil that will come our way. If, and I say if, the Muslims are instilled with proper teachings of Islam, insya-Allah (God willing), we will be able to frustrate whatever evil designs that Western scientists may have in the application of their knowledge."

On the IIU, the Prime Minister said the university is not a theological university but is an institution which is inspired and guided by all the teachings of Islam as a way of life.

The IIU too, he said, must dedicate itself not just to Muslim theology but to preparing Muslims in all fields of learning so as to enable them to build a Muslim "ummah" that is well versed in the fundamentals of Islam and in the skills and knowledge to make them capable of developing their societies and countries to compete in a world so hostile to Islam.