

Muslims weak and divided, says Mahathir

By **Claudia Theophilus**

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PUTRAJAYA, Fri: Weakness and disunity among Muslim countries are the two main stumbling blocks to achieving success and the ability to compete with the rest of the world.

Muslim countries must overcome these problems and speak as one if development is to take place, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Not only are we weak today, we are also divided among ourselves. We are disunited to the extent that if misfortune befalls any of the Muslim countries today, there will not be a single Muslim voice heard.

"For starters, we should be able to reach some consensus on the Palestinian issue and terrorism," he told some 70 ambassadors from Muslim countries who attended a dialogue session at Wisma Putra here.

The ambassadors later joined Mahathir, who was accompanied by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, at buka puasa and tarawih prayers.

Referring to Islam's rise and fall in the early 14th and

15th centuries, Mahathir said squabbles over minor religious points have led to the eventual collapse of the Muslim empires.

Turning to his own experience, he said the elders in his town had argued whether electricity was "haram" in the mosque and had used candles instead.

Another debate was whether motorised vehicles can be used to transport coffins to the grave, he said.

Such divisive debates, he added, further widened the rift among Muslims and weakened the empire.

"The Muslim world missed the entire Industrial Revolution. If we are weak in knowledge, we are open to oppression and our capacity to develop our strength will drop. We cannot then blame the oppressors."

Responding to questions on the two "stumbling blocks", Mahathir said overcoming them all boiled down to proper Islamic teachings which encompass the Quran and Hadith in totality and not in parts.

He also said that the grip of religious scholars on those who cannot rebut their arguments is so strong that they don't believe in learning anything other than Islamic studies.