

12/06/2001

Dr M on the effects of globalisation

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Islamic countries must ensure that globalisation does not result in the marginalisation of their countries similar to what occurred with the Industrial Revolution, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"If we do not keep pace with the rapid advances in science and technology and the changes they cause to the world's perception of things, we will not only be marginalised, but also permanently dominated and hegemonised."

The Prime Minister said Islamic countries would also be exposed to the undermining of religion and value systems.

"We may think we can isolate and insulate ourselves, but this is a false hope. Even if we can keep our borders, we cannot prevent wireless communication from penetrating our society."

Dr Mahathir was opening an international seminar on The Impact of Globalisation on the Islamic World organised by the Foreign Ministry and Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations in the Prime Minister's Department.

He said the systems of Government have to change and Islamic countries have to rid themselves of pre-Islamic and cultural values which were actually not Islamic, but tribal.

"Of course, some of us are extremes, but the vast majority are moderate and rational. We the moderates and the rational must try to understand globalisation, the technology that is driving it and the inevitability of globalisation in some form or another.

"Understanding this, we must prepare ourselves not only to fend off the dangers but to make use of globalisation so as to catch up with the developed countries in both information technology and industrial capacity," he said.

He said globalisation was not just about material wealth but also about values. Muslims must remember they had missed the Industrial Revolution completely.

While they were busy debating whether modernisation was compatible with Islam or not and condemning each other over trivia regarding science and religion, the Europeans, he said were busy applying their new knowledge of things mechanical, of engineering and of reducing human labour with machines.

"Now it looks like we are again going to be left behind in the Information Revolution, a revolution that would shrink the world and force Muslims to rub shoulders with all kinds of people, not only of different religions but possessing new moral values totally repugnant to the Muslims," he said. However, he said globalisation need not mean a borderless world.

"The borders could still be there and should be respected. With borders, we can determine what can cross and what cannot," he said.

With borders, he said, we could protect some of our industries until they were ready to compete and could restrict or impose taxes on products which would compete unfairly with local businesses.

Dr Mahathir also called on Islamic countries to join hands with developing countries to oppose attempts to corner the global market by those setting up huge banks and corporations which prevent any new businesses from starting up or growing.

"Monopolies and oligopolies must be broken down," he said.

"No doubt, huge and capital rich corporations can be more efficient, reducing costs and improving quality, but Islamic countries have been able to achieve a fair degree of efficiency and quality of products have improved without these huge giant corporations or banks," he said.

He said the process may be slower, but efficiency and quality were not static.

In the absence of monopolistic giants, he said the small could hope to build businesses independently, to innovate and to prosper reasonably.

"The pace of globalisation must be slowed down as it is advancing too rapidly," he said, adding that developing countries were unable to cope even with the negotiations on world trade and against numerous experts from the rich countries, and negotiating teams could make no headway.

He also said that currency trading should be regulated and transparent if at all there should be currency trading. He said that while others try to change or stall globalisation, Islamic countries cannot afford to wait for the results of their actions.

"We have to be prepared to deal with the dangers posed by globalisation and learn all about the technologies and the applications they can offer," he said.

He said Muslims must have the capacity to develop the basic software and all kinds of applications, not only in computers and communications, but also in engineering, automated machines and robots, other sophisticated instruments and appliances and a host of other applications.

From these, he said, Islamic countries must "develop our own manufacturing industries so as to reduce our dependence on others".

"We are not going to beat the developed countries but we should be able to catch up with them in time, or at least not be left so far behind as we are now," he added.

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