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Muslims urged to master skills

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on Muslims in the world to master skills which are necessary to help Muslim nations be on par with developed countries.

Drawing attention to why very few Muslims in Muslim countries were capable of developing their nations to achieve a developed status, the Prime Minister explained about the great deal of confusion among Muslims regarding secularism.

He said the Muslims tend to regard anything that was not about the ritualistic expression of Islamic faith, about Islamic laws and 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."

He said this perception of Islam was 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 a community."

In his speech at the official opening of the International Islamic University Malaysia and the second general conference of the federation of universities in the Muslim world in Gombak, Dr Mahathir also said the learning of agricultural science and related subjects must certainly be a duty which Muslims cannot neglect or consider as irrelevant to Islam and the Muslims.

"So are the other sciences which can contribute to the well-being of the Muslims, to their freedom from hegemony and oppression by their enemies," he said.

The Prime Minister said there were some who believed that Muslims could never master the skills and knowledge to compete with their detractors in the invention, production and use of modern weapons and other products.

"This is a defeatist attitude unworthy of Islam. We know very well that the Muslims were superior to all others in the past in the production of weapons, other products and in their skilful usage."

Dr Mahathir said the real reason why Muslim countries were far behind the developed nations was because "we are advised that our religious duty is to study religion because it will gain us merit in the next world".

"Indeed parents are known to insist their children study religion because they, the parents, would gain merit for themselves also. In Malaysia, professionals have been known to express regret that they had chosen to go into a profession when they should have studied religion.

"We know that many Muslims study various non-religious subjects such as science and engineering but many more who should be studying these important subjects are not doing so because even though they may be brilliant they are made to believe that these are secular subjects."

Dr Mahathir said a favourite approach of those who are opposed to the acquisition of non-religious knowledge is to accuse the Government which is promoting non-religious education of being un-Islamic.

"The subjects were all labelled as secular and therefore unsuitable for Muslims to study. Muslim students would feel guilty if they insist on studying these subjects and they would do their best to devote more time to religion in order not to be regarded as impious by their peers.

"The result is that their ability to master these subjects would be

impaired."

Dr Mahathir said in some cases, such Muslim Governments were actually attacked by urban guerrillas and the leaders would be assassinated every now and again.

This resulted in severe shortage of scientists and technocrats. In fact even trained administrators and business managers are in short supply.

The Prime Minister said these were the reasons why there were so few Muslims in Muslim countries capable of developing their countries to the level of the developed countries of the world.

"There appears to be no possibility that a Muslim country would emerge as a world power in the foreseeable future, no matter how big they are.

"The Muslim countries missed the industrial revolution completely. Now we are likely to miss the information age and the concomitant globalisation also. We are simply not prepared for these radical changes in technology and the relation between nations."

Dr Mahathir said globalisation was rapidly advancing and Muslim countries were not even a part of the process of interpreting globalisation.

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

"The IMF 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."

For example, Dr Mahathir said if transparency in Government procurement was agreed to, the locals would have to compete with powerful international contractors who could outbid their local competition.

In the end the local contractors for Government supplies or construction would all go under.

"Either way the poor businesses from the poor countries will lose."

Dr Mahathir said few Muslim countries are conversant with the processes of globalisation. They are all 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."

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