

26 APR 2001

Mahathir-Muslims

MUSLIMS ARE NO LESS CAPABLE OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Harlina Samson

DUBAI, April 26 (Bernama) -- Muslims today are no less capable of acquiring knowledge, of innovations and inventions, of spewing new ideas to build the great Muslim civilization as Islam provides all the necessary guidance, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said for various reasons, the Muslims must go back to the true teachings of the Quran and the Hadith and put their houses in order by administering and governing the country well, promoting stability and economic growth.

"If we are today lagging behind, disdained and oppressed by others, it is because we have actually forsaken the true teachings of our religion and returned to our pre-Islamic ways, feuding with each other, closing our minds to modern knowledge and ignoring reality, deceiving ourselves that we are better than others when we are not," he said.

The prime minister, who arrived here today for a two-day visit, was speaking on "Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century: Role of Muslim Nations" at the Emirates International Forum here.

About 450 participants, mostly corporate and business leaders attended the forum.

Dr Mahathir said the Muslims had misinterpreted or wrongly placed emphasis on the teachings of Islam by stressing on form rather than substance that the Muslims found themselves unable to meet the challenges of the Industrial Age and now the Information Age.

"We should have learnt the lessons from our failure to participate in the Industrial Revolution and should prepare ourselves to participate in the Information Revolution, but we are not," he said.

He said the Muslim nations must use their wealth to build needed infrastructures and to equip themselves with all the skills of the Information Age and the Industrial Age as well.

"We must always be at the cutting edge of technology," he said.

In facing the world that was changing fast physically, technologically and in terms of ideas and concept of human relations, human rights, and the relations between peoples and countries, Dr Mahathir said the Muslims should pause and take stock to plan for the entire future that would take to achieve any degree of success.

Stressing again that the Muslims must go back to the true teachings of Islam, he said the Quran and Hadith had obviously converted the ignorant desert Arabs into a brave and talented people who were able to build in less than 100 years a huge empire from Spain in the west to China in the east, the greatest civilization the world had ever seen.

"If Islam could do these to the Jahiliah, the ignorant ones, there is no reason why it cannot do the same for us now. We are not as ignorant as those feuding Arab tribes," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the truth was that the Muslims had deviated from the teachings of Islam and had at times rejected it in practical terms, and even grossly abused it.

Giving an example, he said the Muslims were told that they were brothers and to fight only with those not of the faith who made the Muslims their enemies but instead, now the Muslims fight "jihads" against fellow Muslims, declaring them infidels when they were actually not.

He said if the Muslims were to follow the true teachings of Islam on the need to be able to defend themselves, one cannot but agree on the need

to acquire knowledge in all fields to ensure the well-being of the Muslims and the safety of their countries.

"We should actually be formulating and improving on all the sciences and the skills required for a modern Islamic states where the ummah is protected and where they are free of poverty, having adequate good food, able to clothe themselves and live in decent dwellings, respected and even looked up by the rest of the world," he said.

Touching on democracy at length, the prime minister said Muslim countries should not be in a hurry to embrace democracy especially liberal democracy as the Muslims do not really understand how it works.

He said Muslim countries today, without exception, were being pressured to switch to democracy because this was the current ideology.

The only good thing about democracy was that theoretically, at least, the government could be changed without violence, he said.

"Good governance is not beyond us Muslims. Rules and regulations, rewards and punishment can be devised to ensure that there is minimal corruption and abuse. System of monitoring performances can be put in place in order to maximise the achievements of the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said for the Muslim countries to play an important role in this century, good governments dedicated to developing the countries to achieve developed country status must first be established.

In this Information Age, he said, the Muslims have to strengthen the Islamic moral strength not by appealing to blind faith but by reason and logic.

Expressing confidence that given the opportunity, Muslims scholars would once again dominate the world, the prime minister said their faith would bring morality into the application of knowledge that they acquired.

Dr Mahathir said the Muslims must eschewed aggressiveness and thoughtless violence and must seek peace and seek to live in peace with the rest of the world.

"I am absolutely sure that the oppression of the Muslims will cease once the Muslims and their countries are as well developed as the best developed countries in the world," he said.

The prime minister said that when the Muslim countries succeed in establishing good governments and developing themselves, they should be prepared to help all poor countries and not only poor Muslim countries.

"The rich of the world, be they Muslims or non-Muslims, must help the poor to enrich themselves. We should not be proselytising but we must correct their wrong impressions of Islam as being an anachronism given to violent and irrational behaviours.

"It is the duty of Muslims to give Islam a good image even if it gains nothing," he said.

Dr Mahathir said to accept globalisation, which so far was an idea crystallised and interpreted by the West, the Muslim countries must have a say in the shaping up of the globalised world.

"Our proposal must be more equitable and fair, aiming at nothing less than the enriching of all the peoples of the world, irrespective of race or religion or geographical location," he said.

The Muslims and Muslim countries must once again play the role that they played when they built the Great Muslim Civilization.

After achieving this or even while striving to achieve this, it was most likely that many of the problems in the relation between Muslim and non-Muslim countries would be resolved, Dr Mahathir said.

-- BERNAMA

HS ES RM