

17/12/2001

Substance, not form, for Muslims' greatness

THE truth can be bitter, but always better. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his Hari Raya message to the nation, made a strong appeal for Muslims to return to the true teachings of Islam and strengthen their relationship among themselves. In his forthright style, the Prime Minister has called on Muslims to focus on the substance and core teachings of Islam rather than on its form.

Religious teaching must ultimately improve and enrich our lives. This is the underlying theme of any major religion. And Islam is no exception. Muslims, as Dr Mahathir has stressed, must attach importance to improving their lives in this world and the next. Muslims must also make it a point to acquire knowledge for without it, they will not be able to compete with the non-Muslims. Whether we like it or not, the world is becoming increasingly competitive. And the people who do best in such an environment will be those who are best equipped with knowledge and skills, and are adaptable and competitive. It's about the survival of the fittest.

It is not true, as some short-sighted and obscurantist religious leaders would like us to believe, that acquiring scientific and technological knowledge would make Muslims less religious. Muslims who are knowledgeable, confident and able to compete with non-Muslims will bring renewed faith in Islam. Muslim scientists such as the late Nobel Prize winner for Physics, Prof Abdus Salam, remained a devout Muslim despite his brilliant scientific achievements in the West.

Muslims will be left further behind if they do not make conscious efforts to learn skills and knowledge to be on par with non-Muslims. Weak Muslim countries will not be respected, as evidenced in what is happening in the Middle East, in particular, and elsewhere. It is imperative that Muslim nations become developed for only then will the world take notice of them.

(END)