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## Advancing through knowledge

reports on "Mahathir Dialogue on Advancement of the Ummah 2002" by P. THE advancement of the Muslim ummah lies in reviving the spirit of the golden age of the Islamic civilisation through the pursuit and advancement of knowledge using science and technology.

Universiti Teknologi Mara vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Ibrahim Abu Shah said the golden age of Islam, 500 years after the Prophet's death, saw the growth of a culture of scholarship and a quest for knowledge.

Islam had flourished in this period of enlightenment due to this culture of knowledge, where scholars had paved the way for the advancement of the ummah through their relentless pursuit of knowledge.

To do this, he called for a review of the role of the mosque in the lives of the ummah.

"This can be achieved by reviewing the whole set-up of the mosque and its functions, and ensuring that those running the mosque are suitably qualified to do so," he said.

Ibrahim, speaking at a discourse on "The Politics of Knowledge, Science and Technology", said imam and theologians, besides being well versed in spiritual knowledge, must also be up to date with skills and knowledge of worldly disciplines.

This was necessary, he said, to enhance the relevance of the mosque as a centre of learning and not just a place of worship.

The discourse was organised by the Institute of Knowledge Advancement (InKA) and is part of the three-day Mahathir Dialogue on the Advancement of the Ummah which ends today.

Ibrahim also said national policies must reflect the need for an education system with an emphasis on merging contemporary skills and knowledge with spirituality.

"It is time to change our priorities and commit to leading and elevating the ummah towards excellence and knowledge advancement," he said.

He cited examples of famous Muslim scholars who had been the forerunners of various branches of knowledge.

He also spoke of how this culture of knowledge slowly disappeared when political leadership at the time were non-committal to Islamic teachings and learnings, and of how the West further destroyed it.

"Colonialism has left Muslim states weak and divided. The Muslim ummah today are largely ignored and marginalised," he said.

Muslims are now associated with suicide bombings and terrorism.

"Muslims are portrayed as players in conflicts and instead of being seekers of knowledge, we are now users of technologies created by others," he added.

Among the ways to change this perception would be to have an effective networking system which would facilitate the exchange of ideas and introduction of beneficial programmes.

He said organisations must work beyond geographical boundaries, pool resources and maximise talents to exploit the fast pace of development.