

19 JUL 2002

Mahathir-Knowledge

MUSLIMS MUST CHANGE MINDSETS TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that knowledge can be a tool for the empowerment of the Muslim community if they succeed in changing their mindsets regarding the acquisition of non-religious knowledge.

He said that when this was achieved and followed by the application of the knowledge, then it could be a tool for the empowerment of the Muslim community.

In his keynote address entitled "The State of the Muslim World Today: Knowledge as a Tool of Muslim Political Empowerment" at the International Forum on Islam (Kalif 2002), Dr Mahathir said that the correct interpretation of what was enjoined by Islam with regards to the acquisition of knowledge was therefore crucial.

"We must not allow ourselves to be sidetracked by the skewed interpretation of Islam which has led us to miss the industrial revolution, to reject electricity and mechanical products and to reduce our capability to defend our faith and ourselves," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the Islamic community must also banish the idea that the only knowledge needed to be acquired was about Islam.

"Neglect of other knowledge has led to our lack of industrial capacity, our capacity to invent and produce weapons to instil fear in the enemy and to defend ourselves. We must stop thinking that the acquisition of knowledge other than religious knowledge gives no merit in afterlife," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the Muslim community should consider that it was an important 'ibadat', an Islamic injunction that is no less meritorious than the study of religion and indeed the ability to study religion depends on the capability to defend themselves.

The prime minister also spoke on the narrow perception of knowledge, saying that Islam was not to be blamed for the interpretation that had resulted in Muslims being so backward in many fields of knowledge crucial to their own well-being.

"Of course knowledge can be a tool to empower us politically but pure knowledge will get us nowhere unless we learn how to apply that knowledge to our own advantage and for the betterment of our lives," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that if knowledge was to be their empowerment, then it must contribute towards their economic, social and security needs.

The prime minister said that knowledge was not static as it was accumulating and expanding all the time and the quest for knowledge must therefore be continued.

He said that there had to be specialists who were expert in particular fields such as the different branches of science, mathematics and medicine.

"Within the Muslim community, which numbers 1.3 billion, every field of knowledge can be pursued and new fields must be uncovered all the time.

"And certainly there must always be an adequate number who pursues religious knowledge, and this division of labour within the ummah will result not only in an empowered society but a balanced one," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Muslims must learn to apply such knowledge and there was no reason why they could not pioneer new knowledge and application.

He said that if Muslims were able to do that, then they could once again gain an edge over the others as they had once did when Muslims

pioneered and dominated the many fields of knowledge.

Dr Mahathir said that the pursuit of knowledge and following that the acquisition of the skills to apply the knowledge would take a considerable period of time.

"We have to remember that knowledge is not static. It is moving all the time and today the speed of discovery and development of new knowledge is exponential," he said.

Dr Mahathir recounted the days when Muslims were at the peak during the great days of Islamic Civilization and it took the Europeans several hundred years to catch up.

"But catch up they did and then they passed us completely. We will have to accept the need to struggle for a considerable length of time.

"If we can prepare to overcome all the problems that can hamper our acquisition of knowledge and we are patient enough then God willing, insyaallah, knowledge can empower us.

"There is no quick fix. One particular people waited for 2,000 years. We will not have to wait that long if we understand the need for knowledge and we learn the lessons of history."

Among those who attended the event were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and local and international Islamic scholars.

The three-day forum is organised as an annual forum to promote discussion on the challenges facing Islam in the contemporary world.

-- BERNAMA

AKT AZZ RM