

Act with clear head, not out of anger, says Dr M

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MUSLIMS must learn to be disciplined in their thinking and act with a clear head, rather than out of anger or emotion, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Monday.

Speaking at a dialogue with Syrian think-tank representatives and scholars, he said Muslims should learn from the Sept 11 terrorist attack that the consequences of thoughtless action could be dire.

"To me, the main lesson is that we do not plan things, we do not strategise, we do not calculate. We just feel angry, and we go and kill ourselves, crash ourselves against the building, the building collapses, and what happens after that?"

"Afghanistan is invaded, Iraq is invaded, the whole Muslim world now lives in fear because anytime at all we can be picked up and thrown into jail," he said in response to a question on the lessons of Sept 11.

To another question on Islam being equated with terrorism, he said killing people achieved nothing.

"They kill you, and you kill them, and they kill you, and you kill them. In the end, what do we get? Nothing," he said.

He said the way to correct misconceptions about Islam was through explanation and information.

The dialogue, held at the Al-Assad Library, was chaired by Information Minister Adnan Omran.

Asked about his aspiration for the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Dr Mahathir urged Muslims to unite, if not on every issue, at least on one specific issue.

"I think we can agree at least on the Palestinian question. Or we can have one united view on the Iraq issue. Just one issue. Let's focus on just the item that we can agree on. In-syaAllah, we can achieve something," he said.

He said they could even co-operate on the economic front, for example, by producing a car together.

"I wouldn't call it an Islamic car but let's work together," he said.

He added that it was not a lack of technology but a lack of co-operation that was hurting Muslim countries, as technology could be purchased.

Dr Mahathir also urged Muslims to make a greater effort to gain knowledge, saying that it was not difficult to learn. It was a question of willingness.

"We can even learn from mistakes of other people. Some people asked me, 'you say look East, look at Japan now, it's not doing well'. I said I'm still looking East. I see how Japan makes mistakes and I don't want to make those mistakes."

He, however, said acquiring skills should not be for the aim of aggression but rather to defend oneself and to have the ability to compete economically.

"Our (Malaysia's) intention is to learn everything, acquire all the skills, all the technology so that we can be independent. And of course, we will work with other Muslim countries.

"Together, we can become as strong as any of the developed countries, not because we want to go to war with them but to make sure that they do not threaten us because they think we are weak."

Asked about corruption, which afflicts many developing countries, he said corruption in Malaysia was not rampant or open.

"Most importantly, of course, is leadership. If the leadership is corrupt, all the way down is going to be corrupt."

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here on Sunday, later left for home after a private dinner with Syrian President Dr Bashar Al-Assad. Dr Bashar and wife Asma also saw Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali off at the airport.

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Presidents Bashar, Bouteflika to attend OIC Summit in October

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Dr Mahathir said Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Syrian President Dr Bashar Al-Assad had also confirmed their participation at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Putrajaya in October.

Asked if Kuala Lumpur would consider inviting government leaders outside the OIC, such as United States President George W. Bush, so that Islamic leaders could engage in dialogues, Dr Mahathir said: "No, I don't think so.

"But if anyone wants to come and if they don't violate our rules and regulations, we will welcome them."

On the probable invitation to Russian President Vladimir Putin to be an observer at the 56-nation summit, he said it was up to the OIC secretariat to decide on the list of non-OIC participants.

On the urgings of world leaders for Malaysia to play a more prominent role in uniting Muslims because it had the credibility and authority, Dr Mahathir said Kuala Lumpur would strive to do what it could.

On calls by foreign government leaders, the business community and Muslim scholars for him to continue to play important international roles after his retirement, Dr Mahathir said he would render his services if and when required, but without holding any posts.

"Some say I should not retire. Others say it is too early and there are those who think that I must contribute my services for the betterment of Muslims.

"I will retire. And I have already stated on numerous occasions that I will continue to assist in whatever I can, even in the party (Umno), I will still assist.

"I will try my best to render my services as required."

He said everyone, particularly other Muslim nations, recognised Malaysia as a model Islamic state, which could develop itself without compromising Islamic values.

"The whole world recognises Malaysia not only as an Islamic state but also as a model Islamic state, which they would like to emulate. Not only Presidents Dr Bashar or Abdelaziz but everyone I've met, including the business community, ministers and senior government officials, endorse us as a role model."

"They are keen to obtain more information on how we have managed to develop our country so that they can emulate our methods.

"It is a popular notion throughout the world that Muslim nations cannot possibly develop themselves.

"But we have proved that a Muslim nation has the ability and capability to develop itself without compromising Islam."

On domestic ~~issues~~ matters, Dr Mahathir, who is the Barisan Nasional chairman and Umno president, said Pas' move to drop its plan to set up its concept of an Islamic state and implement hudud was a clear indication that the Opposition recognised Malaysia to be a progressive Islamic nation.

But that Pas had done so only in its Federal election manifesto showed that it was playing a double game.

"This is to cheat. It has been cheating the people of Kelantan and Terengganu by promising that it would set up an Islamic state, but at the Federal level, it says it is not pursuing the matter.

"This is actually a ploy to fish for non-Muslim votes, but I think Malaysians are not that stupid. They know what Pas is up to."