

# 'World recognises

Excerpts from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's dialogue  
Syria in Damascus on Monday.

NST 21 AUG 2003

**D**R MAHATHIR'S views on progressive Islam found good response from the Syrian Islamic scholars and leaders. They were greatly appreciative of Dr Mahathir's frank opinions, and one scholar urged him to write a book on Malaysia's development in line with Islamic teachings.

The dialogue was chaired by Mohamad Ziadah, Minister of Endowments.

**PM:** I'm sure that you will agree with me that today the Muslim ummah is being oppressed and Islam itself is being insulted. The Prophet of Islam has been described as a terrorist.

Muslims today cannot defend themselves. They can be arrested, they can be tried anywhere and they can be sentenced to death even. Muslim countries are not able to protect Islam or the Muslims.

We have become extremely weak. This is a fact that we have to admit. We can claim that we only appear to be oppressed but actually, we are triumphant, we are doing very well, the fact is that we have lost the glory of the past Muslim empire.

In those days, nobody would dare to oppress the Muslims because we were strong in every way, strong in terms of our knowledge, in terms of our Government, in terms of military capability.

Yes, there were attempts to invade Muslim countries but the leaders were able to defend Muslim territory successfully. But at the beginning of the last century, the Muslims began to weaken, and the Ottoman empire collapsed and was divided up into many nation States.

The States are not united, instead they are subjected to pressure and manipulation by outside forces. The Muslims became weaker and weaker, and more and more ignorant.

Some of us say that we need not acquire modern knowledge, that it's secular knowledge, that we only need to study the religion and theology, and that other knowledge can't bring us any merit.

The result: Muslims are intellectually backward and are quite incapable of competing with the detractors and enemies of Islam.

We have been enjoined by our religion to protect ourselves, yet we don't have ar-

# only might'

with ulama, intellectuals and religious leaders of

mies that have defence equipment. Instead we need the help of those who are not sympathetic to us. We have to rely on them for our needs and defence.

We have neglected the need to acquire knowledge. In the early years, the Muslims had knowledge. The non-Muslims had to come to Muslim countries to acquire knowledge. They had to learn Arabic.

But there came a time that the study of these things was considered as non-essential. Since then, we had neglected the study of science, mathematics, medicine etc.

We have neglected what is enjoined to us, and required by our religion. We are endowed with riches and wealth, but are incapable of using it.

The Quran begins with an injunction to read. To read is to acquire knowledge. Is knowledge only about religion or knowledge as a whole? Obviously, we have to acquire all knowledge that is available.

Yes, we are very religious but the world recognises only strength today. If you are strong, you are respected. It is the law of the jungle where might is right, but the fact is that the world recognises strength. If you are weak, you will be oppressed, your country will be invaded and you will