

26 SEP 2003

Mahathir-Muslims

MUSLIM NATIONS CAN BECOME STRONG IF THEY UNITE

By: Salmy Hashim

NEW YORK, Sept 26 (Bernama) -- Muslim nations can become strong once again if they set aside their differences and unite, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here Thursday.

"Muslim nations have their strengths, not military, but lack of unity has paralysed them. Until they achieve unity, there is no hope," he said at a news conference after delivering his final speech as a head of government at the 58th United Nations General Assembly.

"Muslims are very weak -- there is no doubt about that. They are divided by their beliefs and interpretation of Islam, and their political convictions -- further they are not united on anything," he said.

Dr Mahathir believed that members of the Organisation of the Islamic Organisation (OIC), if united even on one particular issue, could exert a very great influence on the situation faced by Muslims and the situation in Iraq.

Malaysia will take over the chairmanship of the organisation from Qatar when it holds the 10th session of the Islamic summit conference in Kuala Lumpur next month.

On Iraq, the prime minister said that the country could not be turned into a democracy overnight.

With the diverse ethnic groups in the country, "democracy" could create an anarchic situation that could endanger many lives, he said, adding that in such cases, "you may need authoritarian rule."

"We've seen countries adopting democracy overnight. The result is that they do not have a proper government to administer the country well. All they care about is whose turn is it to run the government.

"People accuse me of being an authoritarian ruler, but the fact is that I'm elected by the people and I'm the only dictator about to resign," he said to laughter from the group of international journalists.

On why he painted a bleak picture of the world in his speech, Dr Mahathir said the world was becoming bleaker with the Palestinian problem and terrorism problems unresolved, the front had expanded to an attack on Iraq, while the root cause of the problem remained unresolved.

"We've always urged people to look at the cause rather than take action to counter the problem -- in fact, we're not even allowed to mention the cause of the problem -- I do not know how people are going to resolve this, but there are some things that need to be said," he said.

Earlier in his speech he said: "If we dare to admit it, much of the problems that we face today are due to the arbitrary expropriation of the land of the Palestinians in order to create the state of Israel to solve the European Jewish problem."

-- BERNAMA

SH AHH JK