

16/10/2003

`Avoid making others suffer' (HL)

Firdaus Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Calling for a renewed Organisation of the Islamic Conference which focuses on the agenda for peace and prosperity, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Muslim businessmen must conduct their business in conformity with the proven ethics of Islam and avoid making others suffer.

The Prime Minister said although business was about making profits, it should not be such that others would suffer.

"Thus, the kind of currency trading which leads to the impoverishment of countries and people, to violence and destruction, should not be indulged in by Muslims.

"Reasonable profit through ethically acceptable trading practices should be our objective," he said in his keynote address at the OIC Business Forum at the Marriott Hotel here.

Dr Mahathir said Muslim business ethics could be developed, expanded and systematically taught to understand the rights and wrongs of doing business as a Muslim.

"We have seen how Islamic banking has been accepted. Doing business in conformity with Islamic ethics would in time be accepted also.

"We need not try to force our systems on others in the same way we should not be forced to do business only in the way prescribed by others if they are unfair to us.

"We should resist them not because of our religious piety but simply because they constitute bad and unfair practices. There is too much gambling, too much greed in the marketplace today which result in the exploitation of the poor by the rich.

"Profiteering and usurious practices are rampant and we must reject these. Business is about making profits but it cannot be done at the expense of others."

Dr Mahathir also called for the creation of Muslim business schools which could play an enormous role in inculcating Islamic ethics in business.

"Just as today we go to the great business schools of the West, there may come a day when Muslim business schools would attract students of business from all over the world.

"It would not do world business any harm but should in fact further stimulate business once it is established that Muslim business practices would bring about success and a win-win situation."

The business forum is organised by the Asian Leadership And Strategic Institute.

During the dialogue session which followed the keynote address, moderated by OIC secretary-general Dr Abdelouahed Belkeziz, Dr Mahathir was asked a series of questions, ranging from how he planned to go about enlightening Muslims to how the ummah's confidence could be boosted to face current and future challenges.

On the request for his continued service after his retirement, Dr Mahathir gave an undertaking that he would be around if his services were required.

"If I'm required to speak and explain in any part of the Muslim or non-Muslim world, I would be happy to do so."

On the use of the gold dinar as an alternative to the US dollar in international trade, Dr Mahathir said there was no need for the OIC to

wait for total acceptance before any idea was implemented as "total acceptance" was almost impossible.

On the question of unity among OIC members, Dr Mahathir said while unity was paramount in any cause, Muslims should not be disheartened by the current situation.

"Please don't get down-hearted because we cannot get the Muslims to work together. You cannot get the Christians to work together either, even the Jews are not that united because some do not agree with Ariel Sharon.

"In our case, I see no problem if this OIC Summit can get 10 countries to work out a solution to the present problem, God willing, we will make progress."