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Shed shackles of dependence, Malays told

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Malays need to free themselves from the shackles of dependence, imposed by orthodox scholars and instead, recapture the Quranic culture of openness and freedom, to avoid being marginalised by forces of globalisation.

New Strait Times Press (M) Berhad's Group Editor-in-Chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad in his working paper at a seminar on the Malay Mind organised by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka said the Malays need to wage "jihad" against obsolete knowledge systems and equip themselves with knowledge and skills of the ICT age.

He also urged them to develop the necessary scientific and technological capital.

His speech was read by Berita Harian Deputy Group Editor Mior Kamarulbaid Mior Shahid.

Globalisation was inevitable and the Malays could not afford to merely sit by and watch, he said quoting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Malays, should join the worldwide battle against the dominant structure of globalisation which was a new form of imperialism which sought to perpetuate and deepen the unequal economic, political and cultural relations between the developed and developing world.

Abdullah urged the Malays to take up the Prime Minister's challenge to work towards influencing the thinking on globalisation and reshaping it so that it would not destroy economies and countries.

"The Malays would have to join in the efforts to dismantle the structures of inequality and push for an alternative arrangement of global co-operation that promotes equity and justice."

He pointed to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and other economic calamities such as The Mexican Breakdown of 1994-95 and the Argentinian debt default as painful examples of globalisation gone awry.

Third World countries having discovered that their interest do not coincide with those of the countries in the Washington Consensus, are now fighting back - evidenced by the collapse of the recent world trade negotiations at Cancun, Mexico.

Abdullah also reminded the Malays, that they could no longer react in the traditional manner of retreating into the protective shell of religious dogma; otherwise known as the "refuge of the tired mind", in the words of Ghalib, the 19th century Urdu poet.

"The growing conservatism among many Malays and their obsession with the narrow range of Islamic practices and symbols have contributed to the stagnation of Malay intellectual and spiritual life."

This too, had made many to fall prey to the empty eloquence of religious demagogues who demonise the West and vent their anger and frustration at Western decadence for all the things that have gone wrong in Muslim societies, said Abdullah.

"This narrow world view also re-inforced the misrepresentations of Islam as being backward, irrational, fatalist and fanatical," he said and called for a thorough reform of the way the Malays had been taught their religion, for Islamic education should enlighten the soul and illuminate the mind through the contemplation of the divine.

Additionally, the moderate Malays, must seek to de-legitimise the extremist voices within the community and resist the simplistic call for

the primacy of Islam in public life through the establishment of an Islamic State based on the narrowest perception of the Syariah, he added.

This narrow ethnic or religious agenda could no longer be subscribed by the Malays whose fate were in-extricably linked to other world communities who are just as vulnerable to the predators of globalisation.