

31/05/2003

World witnessing clash of civilisations, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The world is now witnessing a clash of civilisations in which Muslim nations have become the victims, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"It is happening now. We are right in it. The powerful nations of the West are clearly targeting the Muslim nations. Their aim is to reshape and reform the Muslim world after their own fashion," Dr Mahathir said in an interview with the United Press International in London recently, where he spoke on a wide range of issues, mostly on international politics and problems affecting Muslims.

The interview was posted on the UPI website www.upi.com.

Dr Mahathir said the actions by the Western powers were unacceptable to the Muslims as they cherished their traditions and did not want to be divested of their identity.

"We wish to remain ourselves. The focus is on the Muslim world, as shown by the "Who's next?" debate. Any Muslim nation could be invaded under any pretext."

Asked by the UPI journalist Amir Taheri on what Muslim nations should do to cope with the threat, Dr Mahathir said they should first unite.

"They must co-ordinate their political and diplomatic activities - for example, the way they vote in the United Nations.

"They must also use their natural resources and their markets as a means of strengthening their political defences," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although 10 of the 11 members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries were Muslim nations, they could not agree on credible production and pricing policies.

"Securing a realistic price for oil from the wealthy nations could enable OPEC to help developing Muslim nations by offering them cheaper oil."

He said Muslim nations should also work out plans to increase trade, which was now minimal.

"If we are united, those who might want to impose sanctions against any one of us, or even threaten us with invasion, will have to think twice. We, too, should be in a position to counter their sanctions and to defend ourselves more effectively."

Dr Mahathir also reiterated Malaysia's position on the invasion of Iraq by the United States-led forces, saying that there would be serious repercussions.

"This war took place against international law and against international public opinion. It has thrown many international institutions, chief among them the UN, into disarray.

"As a result of this war, weak governments, that is to say the majority in the world, can no longer expect protection from the UN.

"The stronger governments might think that they can do as they please. This is of special concern to me because all Muslim governments can be regarded as weak and vulnerable and thus exposed to the threat of action by the powerful nations."

Dr Mahathir said the UN's authority could somewhat be restored by giving it the responsibility of handling the transition period in Iraq.

This, he added, would enable the Iraqis to choose their own government rather than one that the Americans like.

"The US talks of bringing democracy to Iraq. But what if the Iraqis do

not want democracy? Democracy is developed over decades, even centuries, of social, cultural and political experience.

"It cannot be imposed from the outside. The Iraqis have never had any democratic experience. So why should they be forced into something that they might not be able to handle?"

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether he would assume the role of a spokesman for the Muslim world to seek a dialogue among civilisations when he retired.

"Everyone will soon realise that we need a dialogue of civilisations, not a clash. I certainly hope to continue to speak my mind after I have left government. You know me; I cannot keep quiet even when I am a lone voice, which has often been the case.

"But I do not intend just to talk to the West on behalf of Islam. I will also talk to fellow Muslims about our common problems and what we need to do to preserve our values while at the same time taking full advantage of the possibilities that the global system offers for economic development and better living standards for our peoples."