

Dr M on why Muslims are treated like terrorists

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Muslims are subjected to stringent security checks, as if they are terrorists, because they lack knowledge, says former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This, he added, made them easy to be oppressed and unable to make sophisticated weapons to fight back.

“What we can do is, for example, to kill two or three people here and there by blowing up ourselves or cars filled with bombs. That is all we are capable of because our knowledge is shallow.

“We don’t know how to make weapons, except explosives, which we use to kill just about anyone. And, in the end, Muslims wage war against each other, and create jobs for European and Jewish (arms manufacturers),” Mahathir said in a speech today.

He said this in an address to some 200 secondary school students who were taking part in an information literacy programme organised by the National Library and the Perdana Leadership Foundation.

Mahathir attributed the decline of Islamic civilisations to a 15th Century fatwa, which he said claimed that Muslims could obtain rewards in the afterlife (pahala) through reading religious books, particularly those on Islam, but not other books.

This was despite that when Prophet Muhammad received his first divine revelation - which commanded him to read - there were no books on Islam and most books were written by non-Muslims in Greek, Chinese or Indic languages.

The revelation did not specify or restrict what books to read, Mahathir pointed out, but the books covered a range of topics including science, philosophy, and mathematics.

By mastering such knowledge, he said, the primitive societies in Arabia at the time were able to develop into an empire that stretched from China to Spain and were at the cutting edge of technology, even if they had to first master foreign languages to learn it.

However, as the fatwa took effect, he said, the Islamic civilisation declined because it had shunned science, while European nations progressed, until this day where Muslims can be “killed and tortured” with impunity.

'Master the language of knowledge'

“This is what we see in the history of Islam and the history of Europe. When Muslims have

knowledge, they can build an advanced and outstanding civilisation.

“When they rejected knowledge and that knowledge is taken up by the Europeans, in the end the Europeans built a civilisation that is even more advanced, and can oppress Muslims because Muslims are weak,” he said.

In his hour-long speech, Mahathir repeatedly emphasised the importance of knowledge and urged the students to read more, including mastering the English language because it is the ‘language of knowledge’ and lingua franca today.

“Therefore although it is difficult, we study English not because we want to become orang putih (Caucasians). We won’t, even if we speak as fluently as a Londoner...

“Instead when a person masters English, it will open the way to a huge source of knowledge,” he said, with the caveat that religious books on Islam are more readily available in Arabic.

Previously as prime minister, Mahathir had started an initiative to teach science and mathematics in English at schools, but this underwent several policy flip-flops and was ultimately scuttled due to opposition from nationalist groups, which wanted to maintain the status quo on basis of preserving their respective mother tongues, particularly Malay or Chinese.