

'Use Islam's rich legacy as inspiration to excel'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Muslims must rise above their comfort zones to excel in science and technology or become victims of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday that Islam had a rich legacy of science and culture which should be an inspiration to Muslim societies.

"I am extremely sad that in the Muslim world, the percentage of illiterates is so high. Not only that, there is no Islamic university that has entered the ranks of the top 100 universities in the world. We are left behind in terms of knowledge and the economy, and this is very embarrassing," he said.

He was speaking at the launch of the Scientific Excellence in Islamic Civilisation Exhibition at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre yesterday.

Abdullah, who is also the current chair of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, said the situation could be improved if Muslim leaders changed their mindset and undertook efforts to improve knowledge-building and the economic condition of their nations.

The OIC has 57 member countries but more than half, or 31, are classified by the United Nations as least-developed low-income countries.

The prime minister said Muslims in Malaysia should also strive for glory and innovation to make Vision 2020 a success. They should emulate Islamic scholars in the golden age of Islam, he added.

"The main goal of Islamic scientists in the past was the happiness of humankind. That is why they lived so contentedly back then, using technology in fields like agriculture, botany, medicine and life sciences.

"They gave full attention to all



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi presents the award and a souvenir to renowned historian in the fields of science and technology in the Muslim world, Prof Dr Fuat Sezgin (left) after launching the exhibition yesterday. With them is Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis.

fields and, similarly, that should be our aim," he said.

At the event, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia conferred an honorary doctorate on Prof Dr Fuat Sezgin, a renowned historian in the fields of science and technology in the Muslim world.

He is largely involved with the exhibition, which is a treasure trove of artifacts, replicas, models and collections of technology and innovation organised by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry and the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University.

Eighty-three-year-old Sezgin, who is the institute's founder and

honorary director, was delighted that a university chair for research and the teaching of Arabic-Islamic science history would be founded in UTM.

"To my knowledge, this is going to be the first professorate dedicated to that subject in the Islamic world. The decision to name this chair after me seems, in my estimation, actually too great an honour," he said in his speech.

Sezgin said it was a fact that most Muslim intellectuals were still under the influence of the historic concept of renaissance.

He said they could hardly imagine that their culture once made a significant and creative contribu-

tion in the history of science.

"Historiography of science may seem a kind of luxury in the West, yet for the Islamic world it is of substantial importance. The knowledge of a creative past could inspire a sense of the potentials of the individuals and a general self-consciousness, far removed from superficial arrogance."

The three-month-long exhibition will be held at the KLCC until Jan 14 after which it will be moved to the National Science Centre from Jan 23 to March 31.

As part of the exhibition, the National Science Centre will be organising various science-based activities and demonstrations.