

Learn From The East, Mahathir Tells Islamic Nations
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By Jamaluddin Muhammad

BANGKOK, July 19 (Bernama) -- Islamic nations must learn from the countries of the East if they wish to overcome the challenges of modernity and globalisation, said former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said many countries of the East have mastered the knowledge and skills of industrialisation so that they are able to compete with the West and to grow their countries into rich economies and powerful nations.

"Such is their strength that they are able to ward off Western hegemony and overcome the challenges of modernity and the threats posed by globalisation," he said.

Speaking at a gala dinner in celebration of the 72nd anniversary of the "Pondok Bantan" (local Islamic religious school), here, last night, he said the first need was to acquire and upgrade their knowledge of sciences because modern technologies were based on science and mathematics.

"We must also acquire skills in modern administration and governance as well as knowledge of the workings of the modern economy and its management," he said.

Dr Mahathir said all these would take time but countries like South Korea have been able to accelerate the process.

"While we have to be patient, we must find out how (South) Korea has transformed from a backward country into an industrial giant," he said.

Touching on Malaysia's desire to become a developed nation by 2020, he said the country needed good government in realising its dream.

"In the democratic system, when a government fails to deliver it can be overthrown in the next election. No uprising by the people, no violence would be needed.

"Good government requires good leaders, particularly the man at the very top. He should be someone who loves the country and the people more than himself. Such a person would be less likely to abuse his power or succumb to corruption," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims must continually upgrade their capacity to overcome the challenges of modernity and globalisation so as not to lose again as they did in the 15th century.

He said the struggle to overcome the challenges of modernity and globalisation was endless.

He said the Muslim civilisation once dominated the world but about the 15th century, the situation changed when Muslims decided to forsake the acquisition of knowledge other than what they considered to be concerning their religion.

He said that at that time the sciences, including Alchemy or chemistry and mathematics, were considered to be non-religious and which gave no merit for the afterlife.

At that very time, he said, the Europeans, impressed by the greatness of the Muslim civilisation, decided to acquire the scientific and mathematical knowledge of the Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said they studied Arabic in order to do this and it was the challenge of modernity of that time that they had to face and overcome, and they overcame.

"Not only did the Europeans reconquer land lost to the Muslims, they went on to conquer most of the Islamic countries. By the end of the 19th century, almost all Islamic countries were under European rule," he said.

The gap between the Muslim civilisation and the European civilisation widened and, even after the Muslims regained their lost land, they were constantly being defeated by the new ideas, ideologies and strategies developed by the Europeans to perpetuate their dominance.

He said the changes that they initiated and carried out became the standard for the whole world and these changes represented modernity which Muslims were forced to accept or be left behind.

"The Muslims were literally left breathless as one change followed another. No sooner do Muslim countries adjust and adopt the new ideas and ideologies when another idea is conceived, promoted and forced upon the world by the Europeans," he said.

In the financial market, he said, Islamic countries had fortunately avoided going for easy profits but there would be new ideas coming out of the West for making easy money.

"The challenge is to recognise them and to decide when to seize the opportunities created by them and when to reject them," he said.

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