

# What did Mahathir actually say at the OIC Summit?



HARUN UR RASHID

ON 16th October, Datu Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia for 22 years, delivered a thought-provoking speech at the inauguration of the 10th Summit of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) at Malaysia's new administrative capital, Putrajaya.

However media outlets in the West selectively quoted some extracts of his OIC speech out of context that "the Jews ruled the world by proxy" so as to create further hatred between Muslims and Jews.

Dr. Mahathir complained that reports of his remarks had ignored his condemnation of all violence including suicide bombings, and his call on Muslims to heed to the teachings of the Holy Qu'ran and talk peace with Israel.

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The OIC speech was characterized by its perceptive analysis as to why the 1.3 billion Muslims are

powerless against the domination of Christians and Jews in the prevailing world affairs. They have not only the "pen" but also the "sword".

First, Muslims have to get their act together in acquiring knowledge in the field of science and medicine and not concentrate only on theology.

Middle Ages were steeped in ignorance and superstition. At present reverse is the story. It is reported that more books are translated and produced from Athens than all the Arab countries combined.

Our Prophet's advice for Muslims was that for acquisition of knowledge, one could go even to China. Now the Muslims have shunned away from acquiring knowledge in the context of requirement of the 21st century.

Second, education is central to advancement of a country and of an individual. But it seems that conservative Muslim Ulemas have fought hard and long against what today would consider modern education.

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and scientific discovery.

Third, Prime Minister Mahathir considered that Islam had been interpreted in a way that poverty was Islamic. He said: "This world is not for us. Ours are the joys of heaven in afterlife. All that we have to do is to perform certain rituals, wear certain garments and put up a certain appearance....We need not do anything. We can do nothing against the Will of Allah".

Muslims discourage the learning of science and mathematics, they have no capacity to produce their own weapons. Muslims solely rely on weapons produced by others.

Finally, he stressed on the need "to think". Blind faith is not approved in Islam. Islam is a religion that preaches reason and understanding of the mysteries created by Allah.

Conclusion: Although many Muslims may not agree with his views, they may feel encouraged to look deeper into the fundamentals of Islam in the light of the speech.

Fifth, Muslims have to defend the Islamic Ummah (community). Dr. Mahathir pointed out that Muslims needed "guns and rockets, bombs and war planes, tanks and warships" for defence.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

# Asia's economic ascendancy Is it here to stay?

GHALIB CHAUDHURI

WE have had many false dawns about Asian economic ascendancy. Blistering growth of the nineties was the last one, but sadly it all came melting down with the Asian financial crisis of 1997.

But surprisingly, despite the current anemic growth of the US and the Eurozone, the two regions on which Asia is traditionally dependent, East and South Asian economies have bucked the downward trend of their Western partners.

Today it is this financial powerhouse that is funding the growing budget deficit of the US. For once, not because it is compelled to, but because it suits Asia to do so.

Another indigenous growth engine has been Asia's consumer. Easy monetary policy with low interest rate has led to easy access to consumer credit.

Shortage of foreign exchange reserve of some Asian countries, led to en-masse (barring Malaysia)

capitulation to the IMF and its concomitant stringent terms. The 1997 Asian financial crisis was a bitter pill to swallow.

Colossal Asian reserve is also causing consternation in Western camps particularly in the US. We have recently witnessed how John Snow, US Treasury Secretary, in his Asian trip tried to persuade Japan and China to re-value its currency.

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dollar value and US interest rate would have to go shooting up to attract fresh capital for its burgeoning budget and trade deficit.

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# BOTTOM LINE

The speech could be regarded a timely advice to leaders of Muslim nations. What Prime Minister Mahathir has argued is that the fundamentals of Islam emphasise dignity, higher learning in science and technology, independence, self-help, compassion, modesty, democracy and accountability.

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Our Prophet's advice for Muslims was that for acquisition of knowledge, one could go even to China. Now the Muslims have shunned away from acquiring knowledge in the context of requirement of the 21st century.

Second, education is central to advancement of a country and of an individual. But it seems that conservative Muslim Ulemas have fought hard and long against what today would consider modern education.

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Q'ran that Allah would not change the fate of a community until the community had tried to change its fate itself.

Fourth, he is of the view that striking rigidity in the belief and practices of rituals of Islam are stressed unnecessarily. Rationalists point out that the Qu'ranic descriptions of Heaven and Hell and, in general, of all eschatological subjects are allegorical.

Conclusion: Although many Muslims may not agree with his views, they may feel encouraged to look deeper into the fundamentals of Islam in the light of the speech.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

# HSC result and non-functioning colleges Diagnosing the ills is imperative

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE result of this year's HSC examination has not shown any spectacular improvement over the previous year's in spite of the fact that government and functionaries in the colleges made efforts to rise above the dismay of the past.

The performances of the colleges in Rajshahi Board is appallingly bad and much to our dismay and embarrassment, the performances of the non-government colleges far away from the metropolitan continue to show a worsening trend.

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duced a talented pool of students. These institutions with a rich legacy and tradition had catered education to hundreds of students born of poor parents. Faced with the resource crunch some of these schools and colleges are struggling for survival.

Coming back to school level education, there is no denying the fact that unless a student has his basics built at the school just before completing SSC, he can never fare well at the higher level.

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started what they say 'school business'. That he has started recruiting teachers in the school not on merit but on down payment! Well, this is not the only case.

The ministry concerned must constitute a fact finding committee comprising principals, committed and experienced teachers of reputed colleges entrusted them with the task of making an on-the-spot survey regarding functioning of these colleges, their lapses, deficiencies, eligibility of the teachers, available infrastructural facilities, teachers' attendance, student absenteeism and last but most important of all, political meddling in the college administration.

Mymensingh; Edward College, Pabna; Carmichael College, Rangpur and SN College, Dinajpur - all now exist with faded glory.

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securing 90 percent marks is no big deal. It is quite natural that against the backdrop of the appalling performances of 915 colleges, whatever may be the reason, students will not feel inclined to get admitted to these colleges either at the HSC or degree level of studies.

Reports have it that the education ministry will be issuing two years' notice to these non-performing and non-functioning colleges with subsequent withdrawal of MPO unless these colleges show any spectacular improvement in their performances in the public examinations.

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1,92,713 students coming out successful this year, many institutions will be crying for students and most of the seats will remain unutilized. Most appallingly, many colleges outside Dhaka will not have a single student to admit.

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# Spreading higher education in villages An act of philanthropy worth emulation

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

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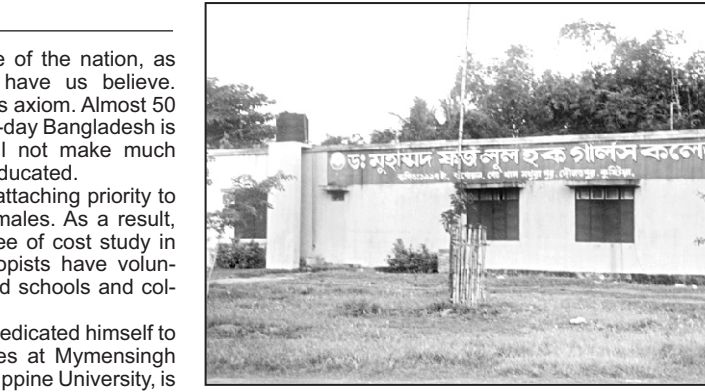
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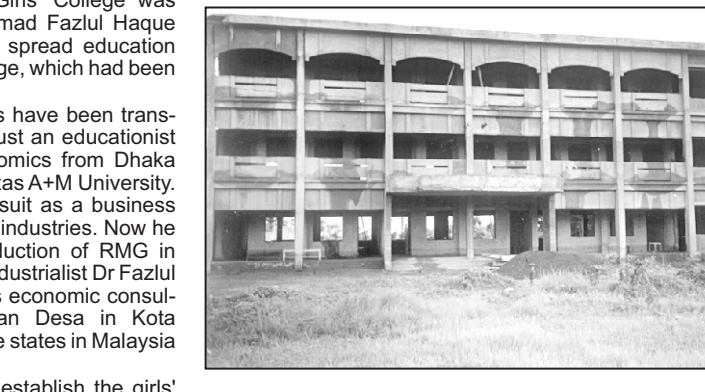
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Entrance (above) and main building of Dr. Fazlul Haque Girls' College



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Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.