

Dr M on so-called experts on Islam

NSunT - 5 JUN 1993

PETALING JAYA, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today criticised the Western media and so-called experts for their deliberate attempts to discredit Islamic resurgence and the Islamic way of life.

At the same time, he urged the Muslim world to close ranks and meet the challenge of misinformation about Islam, "propagated by the so-called protagonists of the Press".

Speaking at the opening of the second general assembly of the Regional Islamic Dakwah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP) here today, the Prime Minister said most of the so-called Western "experts" on Islam were extremely ignorant of even the most basic tenets of Islamic teachings and working knowledge of Islamic history or current affairs.

He said one so-called expert (*Janson: Militant Islam*) had said "In Malaysia, partly under Iranian influence, Muslim fundamentalists are throwing their television sets into the river and ripping the comfortable upholstery out of their cars, replacing it with wooden benches".

"I would like to invite him to conduct a thorough search of the Malaysian rivers for

REPORTS CREATE CLIMATE OF FEAR, SAYS PM

dumped television sets and highways for cars with wooden seats," said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir.

He said this "expert" would also like the Muslims to reject the fact that the Quran is the word of God if they wanted progress.

Ignorance

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also regretted that Government efforts to set up the Islamic Bank and International Islamic University have also been criticised and misinterpreted by the international media and correspondents.

He said their sensational reports, based on ignorance, had created an image of Islam as a religion which need not be understood, but only to be feared.

"Their malicious distortions and ignorance have created a climate of fear and prejudices

against Islam and its followers," he said.

On the coverage of Islamic resurgence, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Western media tended to give unfavourable labels to Muslims and favourable ones to the adversaries of the Muslims.

"Muslim groups, fighting to maintain their Islamic identity against oppressive regimes are most often called "terrorists", "aggressors", "insurgents" or "separatists", but not freedom fighters.

"Labels such as 'extremists vs moderate' and 'fundamentalist vs progressive' are used with ulterior motives."

When they talk of Islamic revolutionary fervour, the Western Press, he added, were protecting the vested interests of certain groups, namely the interests of super-powers.

The media, he said, instead of making any effort to understand the teachings of Islam in relation to socio-economic and political developments, were accentuating doubts and hesitation as to the sincerity of Islamic intentions and the capacity of Islam to deal with contemporary problems.

The Prime Minister

said: "Islam must be free from any form of neo-imperialistic influences, so it can give its own answer to the world's desire for a true and lasting peace."

He regretted that Western media frequently projected efforts by Muslims to inculcate proper Islamic values and practices as something to be feared and that these efforts were propagated by people they termed "fundamentalists".

He said since the dictionary, termed fundamentalists as "adherence to traditional beliefs of any kind", all Muslims then must be fundamentalists.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the current revival of Islamic awareness came at a time when dominant ideologies of socialism, capitalism and communism were being questioned for failing to deliver the goods.

He added that it was necessary for non-Muslims, just like the Muslims, to examine the message of Islam with open-mindedness and without prejudice.

"If Islam has nothing to offer, why worry about it? If it has something to offer, why deny it to yourselves?"

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir added that it was also wrong for these critics to imply that the fostering of an Islamic way of life would endanger the rights of non-Muslims.

"Islam has always recognised non-Muslims as ummah, or community on par with the Muslim community," he said.