

# Day One of Bank Islam

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**KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. —** The country's first Islamic bank went into operation today, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad signing up as its first customer after a simple opening ceremony.

Launching the bank, he stressed that the setting up of Bank Islam Malaysia Bhd (BIMB) is to prove that the assimilation of Islamic values in the country's economy will not bring calamities.

"It is not a manifestation of the arrogance of Muslims or a symbolic effort to demonstrate the country's Islamic religious fervour.

"What is needed, is not a symbolic gesture, but an effort to ensure that the Islamic banking system can play a role in a modern economy."

The Prime Minister said the setting up of Bank Islam was to provide an alternative to the Western (traditional banking) system.

It was also a way of following Islamic principles in financial management and modern economy.

throughout the Islamic world and non-Islamic countries to serve modern and progressive economies.

"But if the bank fails, the belief that Islam is suitable for all ages and all civilizations will be undermined. This will

He said Muslims who wished to see the progress of Islam should give their support as the success of Bank Islam will prove that Islam is for all times.

He said: "If not for politics, this bank will be accepted by all Muslims in Malaysia easily. Unfortunately, as politics seems to take precedence over religion for a section of the population, the bank has attracted criticisms and condemnations from certain quarters.

## Progressive

"By right, the establishment of the bank should be well-received by all Muslims, yet we still hear criticisms which should not be heard.

"There are those who question why other banks should continue to operate in the country if there is already an Islamic bank. Then there are others who say that Bank Islam is not Islamic because its staff wear neckties."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he was convinced that if BIMP was well received by Muslims and non-Muslim customers, then the bank would expand rapidly.

"If Bank Islam succeeds, not only will other Islamic banks be set up in the country but also

lead to the thinking that Islam is not suitable for progress."

The Prime Minister reiterated that there were no plans to eliminate other banks because not all the citizens in the country are Muslims and also because the banks are part of a wider system.

Malaysia is dependent on its trade with the world, especially non-Islamic countries.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir stressed the bank was Islamic only in the mode of its management and operations and not due to the fact that it was owned, managed or patronised by Muslims.

Bank Islam is a modern institution required to meet the capital and financial conditions of a modern economy.

The launching ceremony was witnessed by Cabinet members, including Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Culture, Youth and Sports Minister Anwar Ibrahim, former Bank Negara Governor Tun Ismail Ali, former Finance Minister Tun Tan Siew Sin, bankers and members of the diplomatic corp.

The Prime Minister said the ceremony marked the first phase of Bank Islam's success — which is the fruition of the recommendations of the National Steering Committee.