

# The Islamic extremism in our midst

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — That there can be government officers who refuse to handle documents which contain the word *babi* (pig) is a frightening example of the Islamic deviationism and extremism that is present in our midst.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, who cited this example in his presidential address to the recently-concluded Umno general assembly, later explained that though generally such practices were not widespread, he had referred to it so that the trend could be checked before it soars.

Dr Mahathir has repeatedly stressed that what is important in Islam is the substance, not the form.

In a speech made four years ago at the Umno Youth and Wanita Umno general assemblies, he not only made this point clear but also stressed that it was the deviationism — and not fundamentalism — practised and preached by Islamic extremists which was confusing the people.

Fundamentalism means going back to the true Islamic values of tolerance, trustworthiness, cleanliness, hard work discipline, seeking knowledge and using it effectively for the good of society.

Deviation, however, was the interpretations of the Quran preached by self-styled *ulamaks* for an ulterior motive, usually for reasons of politics and power.

In Friday's speech, Dr Mahathir also criticised the "hypocrites" who used Islam as a label to sell their products and cited as an example *Islamic mee* and also the interpretations of the Quran made by some Muslims imposing new and unheard-of restrictions on Muslims.

Although his attack was aimed primarily at PAS, his comments were also an indication of the extent of deviationist teachings which some Muslims here appear to accept too readily.

Among the Muslim civil servants who refuse to handle documents containing the word *babi* are some highly-educated ones.

In the universities, there are some lecturers preaching their own version of Islam and hoping to influence the minds of their students.

While some of these civil servants, or lecturers may be members of sympathisers of PAS and preach their own versions of the Islam for political purposes, there are also those who are genuinely confused.

There is a real danger that if the trend is not checked now, religious extremism may one day destroy national unity in this multi-racial country.

Although Islamic extremism is the most publicised form of religious deviationism in this country, there are those among the followers of other religions who

too appear to be getting a little fanatical.

The dangers of religious fanaticism is something which the Government has shown it is prepared to handle but the problem is that it has to step very delicately because of the sensitivities involved.

If Umno is to ensure continuing support among the Malays and prevent them from supporting PAS, it has to show that it is prepared to struggle for Islam.

On the other hand, given the multi-racial character of the country, the Government has to be careful that it does not alienate the other races which practise their own religions as provided for in the Constitution.

Politically, the religious question is a minefield through which the Government has to tread warily — on the one hand are those even in Umno, who demand

that the Government become more Islamic; on the other are the genuine fears expressed by non-Muslims.

Given these pressures, it is not surprising that the Government gets no thanks from either side when it does do something positive about Islam — like setting up the Bank Islam or the policy of disseminating Islamic values in the administration.

The critics of the Government — from PAS as well as the genuinely confused Muslims — claimed that Bank Islam and the dissemination of Islamic values did not go far enough; non-Muslims voiced fears over

what they perceived to be an increasing trend towards an Islamic State.

In such a climate — with an opposition party determined to preach its own version of Islam and subsequently cash in on the confusion generated by this and with non-Muslims nursing their own fears — the real issues have been lost in the emotional arguments.

Dr Mahathir made it plain that his administration was not out to suppress the other races. He has also made it clear, and repeatedly too, that through the adoption of Islamic values his government hopes to inculcate values such as trustworthiness, cleanliness, discipline and hard work.

He has also made clear to Umno members and other Muslims that it is on these genuine values that they must concentrate — in other words, the substance rather than the form.

But even while his administration tries to give the voice of reason, a fair hearing, PAS has been undermining it by using Islam for political purposes.

And while Umno leaders have a deep understanding of the religion he has distinguished between Islam, the Arabs and the Malays and pointed out that some of the forms of Islam — such as clothing — are just Arabic and not Islamic.

As there are some in the MCA who are trying to "out-DAP" the DAP in championing the cause of the Malaysian Chinese.

Umno has shown in the past that it will not succumb

to the pressures imposed by the religious extremists but the problem now is how to check the spread of deviationist teachings without providing political ammunition to PAS.

One way would be to ensure that the religious department officials are really on their toes; another perhaps would be to ensure that the Islamic scholars the Government employs to spread the true teachings of Islam are up to the mark; civil servants and university lecturers found to be preaching or practising deviationist teachings could perhaps be given other jobs where they would not be positions of influence and put through a course of rehabilitation.

But most important of all, perhaps, is that Umno lecturers themselves must understand the true teachings of Islam and reject totally deviationist teachings, even if it means that they would have to face criticism for not practising the forms of Islam.

Dr Mahathir has set an example. Not only does he have a deep understanding of the religion he has distinguished between Islam, the Arabs and the Malays and pointed out that some of the forms of Islam — such as clothing — are just Arabic and not Islamic.