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KUALA LUMPUR, SEPT 29 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SRI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD REITERATED TODAY THAT MUSLIMS NEED NOT BE DISUNITED BECAUSE OF DIFFERENCES IN INTERPRETING THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM.

HE TOLD THE UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY HERE THAT THE RELIGION WAS NOT MEANT TO CREATE A BURDEN OR DIFFICULTIES FOR ITS FOLLOWERS.

WHAT WAS REQUIRED BY ISLAM WAS THAT ITS FOLLOWERS BE GOOD AND REPENT IF THEY HAD COMMITTED ANY WRONG, HE SAID.

WINDING UP THE DEBATE AT THE ASSEMBLY, THE UMNO PRESIDENT SAID THERE WERE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE QURAN AND HADIS BY ULAMAS BUT THIS DIFFERENCE SHOULD NOT BECOME AN EXCUSE FOR CAUSING DISUNITY AMONG MUSLIMS.

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UMNO-RELIGION 2 KUALA LUMPUR

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR CITED AS AN EXAMPLE VIEWS ON THE SHAKING OF HANDS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE NOT +MUHRIM+ (CLOSELY RELATED PERSONS WHOM THEY CANNOT MARRY) BY THE SHEIKH OF CAIRO'S AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY.

THE SHEIKH, WHEN CALLING ON HIM AT HIS OFFICIAL RESIDENCE HERE, HAD SHAKEN HANDS WITH DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH ALI ALTHOUGH ACCORDING TO THE SHAFIE SECT THIS WAS +HARAM+ (NOT SANCTIONED BY RELIGION).

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT WHEN HE ASKED THE SHEIKH FOR HIS VIEW ON THIS, THE SHEIKH EXPLAINED THAT SEVERAL OTHER SECTS LIKE THE HAMBALI AND MALIKI DID NOT CONSIDER IT +HARAM+ AND HE SHOOK HANDS SO AS NOT TO OFFEND THE HOSTS, WHICH WAS MORE IMPORTANT.

+FOR ME, MY INTENTION IN SHAKING HANDS WITH YOU LADIES IS GOOD AND NOT CROOKED AND IS AIMED AT PROMOTING CLOSER TIES BETWEEN A LEADER AND THE PEOPLE,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID. -- BERNAMA

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