

Ensuring survival of Muslims

Unity the key, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Unity among Muslims is the most important basis for ensuring the future and survival of the community, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

To ensure unity, Muslims must practise moderation and act wisely in their approach to all matters by taking into consideration the situation and norms of society.

Opening the International Seminar on Muslim Unity at the Islamic Centre here, the Prime Minister criticised those who considered unity unimportant.

He said these people instead sought popularity and adulation by deliberately raising issues that could divide the Muslim community.

"Their activities have clearly deviated from the fundamental principles and teachings of Islam which advocate its followers to unite," he said.

Animosity

Dr Mahathir urged those who used extremist approaches to change their attitude. In this way, they could ensure that the changes they sought were not opposed or rejected.

"We must be aware that if we want the people to accept something that is good, we must think of the strategy, means and approach to adopt, so that the matter is well received."

Dr Mahathir said exhortations which disregarded good behaviour and principles of Islamic morality would not bring any benefit but would instead give rise to strong opposition, extremism and disunity.

Because of such extremism,

the original message would be forgotten and there would be animosity among the parties affected, he added.

Islam, Dr Mahathir said, opposed all forms of extremism, because it not only threatened harmony and peace but also national security.

The religion instead teaches its followers to practise the principles of moderation because by being moderate, they can be fair.

"A harmonious and peaceful society would then be created. The form and type of moderation will become the yardstick by which the people can teach and be fair to others."

Dr Mahathir also expressed concern over allegations that Christians were trying to convert Muslims.

He stressed that in a multi-racial society like Malaysia, misunderstanding among the different faiths was extremely dangerous.

He cited the example of enmity between Muslims and Christians which had des-

troyed Lebanon and the hostility between Protestants and Catholics which had divided Northern Ireland, and called on the people to be cautious when making sensitive statements.

Dr Mahathir said there was no proof to substantiate allegations of Christians trying to convert Malays, although there were cases of Muslim converts reverting to their original faiths.

He hoped that such irresponsible allegations were not repeated as the Government did not want enmity between the races.

The Prime Minister said that Muslims now were not united.

Apostasy

"They have two imams, mosques and cemeteries ... and now there are attempts to set up separate villages. If misunderstanding occurs with the other religion, the country will never be peaceful again."

Dr Mahathir said the *kafir-mengkafir* issue that had prevailed a few years ago was now being replaced with claims of apostasy among Muslims.

To support such argument, a verse of the Quran has been taken in isolation and interpreted without considering the context of the Quran as a whole, he added.

About 240 participants, including 18 from overseas, are attending the three-day seminar.

Leading speakers from seven countries, including Malaysia, will present papers on religious extremism and experiences of the different Governments in coping with them.