

# STOP IT, SAYS PM

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By JUNE H.L. WONG

**KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned today that there would be no peace in the country if misunderstandings between religions are allowed to persist.**

He also called for an end to "irresponsible allegations" — such as those claiming that Christians were trying to convert Malays — because such talk could lead to disputes which could be extremely dangerous in a multiracial and multi-religious country like Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir also warned that people should be careful about making statements on religion because it could lead

to riots between the different religious communities.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the opening of an international seminar on Muslim unity at the Islamic Centre here this morning. About 240 delegates, including 18 from overseas are attending the three-day meeting.

Dr Mahathir said there was no clear evidence to support allegations that Christians were proselytising amongst the Malays. There were only cases of ex-Christians returning to the faith after they embraced Islam because of marriage.

Nor, said Dr Mahathir, was there any actual proof that 66,000 Malays had converted to Christianity and other religions or had become atheists (as claimed by PAS president Haji Yusof Rawa early this month).

At the same time, he said, unity was not that strong within the Muslim community.

"We have segregated ourselves with

different imams, mosques and cemeteries; we also want to perform the haj separately. Now we have attempts to set up different kampungs to break up the Muslims," he added in his opening address.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, Dr Mahathir said the plan was to set up new kampungs with their own mosques which were "confined to one group of people only."

He said these "incipient attempts" to set up these kampungs were taking place in Kedah and Terengganu. The Government had yet to identify the groups responsible.

Asked what the Government was doing to bind Muslim converts more closely in order to discourage them from renouncing the faith the moment they faced difficulties, Dr Mahathir said:

"We can only offer explanations on Islam; to use other action or force may have negative results."

He also said there were no plans to introduce laws to punish people who

were guilty of apostasy. "We prefer to use explanations. Anyway, we should not easily accuse people of apostasy because it is the same as calling others infidels. We can't just latch on to a single aspect which we extract from the Quran and, with that, deliver judgment," he added.

On Tunku Abdul Rahman's suggestion today that Non-Malay Muslims be given the same privileges as those accorded to Malays, Dr Mahathir said this was a matter to be studied "because the definition of a Malay is different in the Constitution which was made in the time of the Tunku."

Asked whether this meant Muslim converts could not qualify for Malay status, he replied: "If they qualify according to the Constitution's definition of a Malay, then they have the status."

(According to the Constitution, a Malay "means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the

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Malay language, conforms to Malay custom...")

Dr Mahathir had, in his opening speech to the delegates at the seminar, also criticised a book which listed 10 categories as to how a person could be considered an apostate but failed to take into consideration other factors, such as the environment, that could be relevant to the case.

According to the book, he said, a Muslim minority in a non-Islamic country was considered to have committed apostasy if it chose non-Muslims to be the leaders.

"There are also some who question whether Muslims can be in the same room as non-Muslims or for them to sit and eat together. If all these 10 categories are considered to lead to apostasy, then many Muslims have committed apostasy; especially in a multiracial country like Malaysia.

"With so many Muslims in confusion over their religion, it makes it harder to have unity in the community," he added.

The Prime Minister stressed that Muslim unity was the most important factor since the very survival of Muslim society depended on it.

"There is a group who think that this is not important and that Muslim disunity is beyond their control. Then others who deliberately raise certain issues even though they know that this would bring disunity."

These people, he added, were more interested in gaining popularity and the support of a certain group.

"Their action is clearly a deviation from the basic principles and teachings of Islam which tell us to be united."

Dr Mahathir also pointed out that Islam was against all forms of extremism, be it in speech, action or approach.

"Extremism not only threatens the peace and harmony of a society, it also threatens the security of a country. Islam's objection to such an attitude is not confined to just one race or religion but to all races and religions," he said.