

Don't accept just any ulamak: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised Muslims to be careful in accepting anyone with some knowledge on Islam as religious authorities or ulamak.

He said they should first study the teachings such people preached, their importance and relevance as this could help prevent deviant teachings which already exist in the country from spreading and further disuniting the community.

The Prime Minister, addressing a two-day gathering of 1,700 mosque religious teachers today, said the present disunity among Muslims should not be viewed lightly.

Dr Mahathir said in this context, religious teachers and those with such responsibility should use their knowledge correctly to "awaken, unite and develop Muslims in Malaysia.

"You should guard the strength of Islamic leadership so that it would not be threatened by materialistic or reli-

gious weaknesses," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Islamic resurgence today had heightened the interest of Muslims, particularly young people, in the faith and they were thus easily influenced by those who claimed to be experts in the religion.

Previously, Muslims in Malaysia only had one sect and there were no differences in opinion about Islamic practices.

Bad influence

"Today, however, there are different groups with different practices and beliefs because of the influence of people who claim to be religious authorities."

This difference in beliefs had not only led to animosity among Muslims but also cause the spread of deviant teachings guided not by wisdom but by force.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims

★ TURN TO P3, COL1

'Wise Muslims not giving their best'

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★ FROM PAGE ONE

should nevertheless seek worldly knowledge as well as that of the after-life so that they may compete with others well.

Wisdom in the spread of knowledge, language, action and leadership is one of the ways to ensure social and national harmony, he said.

"Knowledge and wisdom are

two things which cannot be separated.

"Even then, there are people in the Muslim community here who are knowledgeable in certain fields but do not use their wisdom when performing the duties given to them. This situation has given rise to negative effects in society," Dr Mahathir said.

He said it was this failure to

perform their duties wisely which have held up certain programmes and plans drawn up for religious and national progress.

Right fold

At the same time there were those who exploited this situation and made their own interpretations and blind accusations to confuse Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said religious authorities should put aside other interests in an effort to bring the Muslim society in Malaysia back onto the right path.

"Religious teachers who have no other priorities except Islam should ensure that clear and true teachings are disseminated. This is their main responsibility," he said.