

INTERACT, MUSLIMS TOLD

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The Prime Minister today told Muslims to accept the reality that Malaysia was a multi-racial and multi-religious country and urged them to interact more with the rest of the population.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said they should not isolate themselves or minimise contacts with non-Muslims, if greater and better understanding among the races was to be fostered.

"Whether we want it or not, we must interact with non-Muslims. If Muslims want to progress, they must be able to interact with others in a multi-racial society.

"Isolating oneself from the non-Muslims is not the way," he said when launching the Yayasan Nadwah Akademi Islam (Nadi) Berhad, an Islamic missionary foundation, at the Islamic Centre here.

Non-Muslims too should interact with Muslims, he added.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that of late there had been feelings of suspicion among the races which would not have occurred if Muslims and non-Muslims understood each other's customs and ways of life.

Experience

"I realise that it is not easy for us to foster feelings of understanding but by the grace of God such feelings could be fostered," he said.

Unfortunately, there were some Muslims leaders and *ulamak* (theologians) who did not interact at all with non-Muslims, thus abetting in the development of an attitude that was unsuited to the Malaysian reality.

He said all programmes and approaches to overcome this would surely fail if this reality was not taken into consideration.

Dr Mahathir said religious leaders, especially *ulamak*, should advise Muslims how they could interact with non-Muslims. But they must themselves interact with non-Muslims so that their advice would be based on experience.

"Just to advise from afar will only confuse the Islamic community. A cordial and sound relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims must be maintained to ensure peace in the country as required by Islam."

Dr Mahathir also said missionary work fell into two broad categories — to strengthen the Islamic faith and to spread the message of Islam to non-Muslims.

He conceded that most religious teachers had contributed towards strengthening the

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Islamic faith among the Muslims but not many of them mixed with non-Muslims, at the very least, to ensure that Islam was not misinterpreted.

Dr Mahathir said Islam surely called on its followers to ensure that Islam was not misinterpreted as well as to preach the religion to those who had not embraced it.

He recounted how Prophet Muhammad mixed with the non-Muslims when propagating Islam in Mecca and Medina, adding that if such interaction did not take place the Islamic religion could not have spread.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the need for honesty and integrity in business saying that Muslims must give priority to such matters in whatever business they participated in.

He said untrustworthiness and dishonest acts in business would make society lose confidence in Muslims and impede the businesses of the Muslims themselves.

Many Muslims rightly did not want to be involved in businesses that were considered *haram* but ironically there were some among them who did not give priority to trustworthiness and honesty in their dealings, he said.

"There are those who borrow with no intention of paying back, using the loans for other activities and misappropriating funds entrusted to them."

Dr Mahathir said such acts were no less evil than dealing in businesses that were forbidden in Islam.

He hoped that the Nadi Foundation would set a good example and maintain a high level of performance in its business ventures so that "their missionary work will not be confined to words only".

He said if the foundation failed, it would not only be a loss to Muslims but would, to an extent, tarnish the credibility of Islam.

Dr Mahathir also lauded the foundation's plans to hold activities to promote a greater understanding of Islam as well as to carry out economic activities to generate funds.

The foundation's policy in wanting to be self-reliant, he added, was encouraging as there were now numerous organisations that depended on Government aid for funds.

The Prime Minister later presented an award to Datuk Amar di-Raja Awang Haji Ismail Abdul Aziz, 77, the Mufti of Brunei Darussalam, who was named the first recipient of the Nadi Personality Award.