

PM: GROUPS HINDERING EFFORTS TO FORGE UNITY

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PETALING JAYA, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today deviationist groups are hampering efforts by the country's leaders to forge Muslim unity.

"In the midst of our efforts, these groups are confusing the people by making issues out of the *tarikah* (mystic path to the Truth), *tarikah kiamat* (end of the world) and the *Imam Mahadi* (the Messiah)," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir, who was opening the fifth *Ulamak* Conference at the Tabung Haji Complex in Kelana Jaya here, did not identify the groups but said deviationists had claimed to know where the *Imam Mahadi* was, who he was and when he would re-appear.

"These are not matters to be questioned or determined by anyone.

"History has shown that where the issues had been misinterpreted, they had eroded the *akidah* (the Faith) and split the Muslims.

"Muslims in many countries had been

ruined merely because someone claimed to have information which nobody could possibly have," he added.

Asked by reporters later if he was speaking about any particular group, the Prime Minister said he was speaking out in general against those who tried to undermine Islam.

Dr Mahathir said the Government could not act against any group said to be deviationist without the advice of the *ulamaks* and reports by the people.

"We have heard of people being abducted from their families by deviationist groups but their parents are reluctant to make a report.

"At the same time, our laws are loose about such matters," he added.

Dr Mahathir said that to fight the spread of deviationist teachings there must first be an awareness of the threat among the Muslims themselves. The people must also co-operate with the authorities by making reports, he said.

He said while the threat from deviationist groups was not that serious, measures

had to be taken from now to prevent the situation from becoming critical.

Dr Mahathir also stressed on the need for unity in tackling this issue. "Muslim unity is Malay unity. If there is unity among Muslims, there is Malay unity and vice versa."

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said that since the country's independence, *ulamaks* had been serving the people despite various challenges aimed at eroding the faith and unity of the Muslims.

"It is unfortunate that certain groups who only recently became familiar with some aspects of Islam are trying to impose their influence on others for their own selfish ends.

"They hide behind the guise of religion and are saved from much criticism. And this has made them so conceited that they claim they are more qualified than anyone else to manage the country's religious affairs," he said.

Dr Mahathir said these groups interpreted Islam to serve their own needs.

He said Muslims were susceptible to

deviationist teachings because they did not question those who claimed to be an *ulamak*.

The Prime Minister said that although *ulamaks* played an important role in helping to shape the country long before it gained independence, their approach now varied from the pre-Merdeka days.

He said in the past the *ulamaks* were not so particular about matters like the wearing of *serbans*, cloaks and the *purdah* or issues like the *Imam Mahadi* and polygamy, and the people easily accepted their teachings because they did not deviate and did not cause confusion.

"*Ulamaks* and religious teachers before independence spread Islamic teachings not to seek influence, popularity or self gain," he said.

About 100 *ulamaks* are attending the three-day conference organised by the Malaysian Islamic Missionary Foundation. Present were Minister in the PM's Department Datuk Dr Yusof Nor and Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim.