

PM: Self-styled ulamak have 'hurt' religion

1991

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Muslim thinkers to examine deeply Islamic thought and civilisation in the light of today's varied interpretations on the religion made by different types of *ulamak*.

The Prime Minister said self-styled *ulamak* have reduced Islam and the Muslims to an inferior status, adding that before the interpretations and teachings of these *ulamak*, the Muslims were the most successful people in the world.

Muslims were also given conflicting *fatwas* (rulings) by some of these *ulamak* and the matter has become more complicated when scholars and pretenders allowed their own vested interests or those of their patrons to influence their thinking.

Dr Mahathir said this when he opened the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (Istac) here.

"As a result, the single religion of Islam that was brought by the Prophet acquired different and frequently conflicting interpretations. Different groups of Muslims, who believed and worshipped in different

ways, emerged."

"The Syiahs, the Sunnis, the Khawarij and Druzes and numerous divisions appeared in the Muslim world only to be divided further by the interpretations of different imams from each group at different times ... Islam had become many religions with many different practices and beliefs."

Many of the teachings and interpretations of Islam as made by some of the *ulamak* and believed to be sacrosanct are clearly damaging to Islam and Muslims, he said.

In the early years of Islam the religion was acknowledged by all, the Muslims and the non-Muslims, as a great religion which converted the nomadic Jahiliah Arabs into a great people with achievements not only in the spread of the great teachings of Islam but in all fields of knowledge, the arts, the sciences, medicine and astronomy.

In other words, Islam converted a backward people into the founders of the greatest civilisation of all time.

The Prime Minister said: "If today Islam and the Muslims are reduced to depending on others for their skills

and knowledge and even their own defences, if today Muslims are forced to grovel at the feet of their enemies, helpless even to resolve the problem of the Zionists, it is not because of Islam but the interpretations of Islam by the frequently self-styled *ulamak*, who emerged after the golden days of Islamic glory.

"It is these *ulamak* with their rigidity, their belief that this world is not for the Muslims, that the most important expression of *iman* is continuous rituals of obedience to *Allah*, that what is *sunnat* and therefore is optional must be considered as *wajib* (compulsory); it is these people who have reduced Islam and the Muslims to the inferior status that they are now."

Dr Mahathir told the gathering of Muslim thinkers it is in this kind of Muslim world that the thinkers are required to examine Islamic thought and civilisation.

"You can choose not to disturb the status quo to avoid controversy, to play safe. But if you do that, you cannot be doing any thinking and cannot be called thinkers."

"Only if you choose to think, to enquire, to ac-

knowledge the miserable state of the Muslims and Islam, to reason and to criticise the accepted interpretations of the religion, to debunk and to reach conclusions which in the context of present practice may sound radical or even heretical and to declare your stand, only then would you have justified the role that you and the institute are required to play.

"I would like to warn you that if you dare to be honest, you will be charged with being heretical by those who have accepted the present teachings and practices.

"This is the risk you take. A risk far less than that taken by the Prophet when he undertook to preach Islam. Of course you are ordinary mortals and can be wrong. Nor will you have the protection accorded by *Allah S.W.T.* to the Prophet.

"But the deviation in teachings of Islam and the sad plight of Islam and the Muslims resulting from some of the present interpretations and teachings require that someone accepts the risk, someone committed enough to Islam to set aside personal consideration."