Islam allows flexibility, says Dr M

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DR MAHATHIR
Islamic values

From Padmaja Padman

LONDON, Wed. — Islam allows its followers flexibility in adapting religious practices to geographical and localised situations, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here yesterday.

For this reason, any move to implement *hudud* laws must be carefully considered if this is not to do more harm than good in a society, the Prime Minister told about 300 Malaysian students at a meeting.

Dr Mahathir, who was here on a two-day private visit, was accompanied to the meeting at the Malaysian Students Department (MSD) by former Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Also present were Malaysian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Tan Sri Wan Sidek Wan Rahman, his new deputy Salim Kassim, and MSD director Abdul Rahman Kasbon.

Dr Mahathir, who briefed the students on current developments in Malaysia, took the opportunity to explain the "burning question" of the proposed implementation of ***hudud*** laws by Kelantan's Pas-led Government.

"The politicising of religious issues will only breach the peace within the Malaysian society. *Hudud* laws are not imnlemented in many Islamic countries as such a move would have to suit existing circumstances."

He said the actions of irresponsible people had caused some to look on Islam as an inconsiderate, cruel and hostile religion instead of a compassionate, fair and just way of life.

"If the ***hudud*** laws were only to apply to Muslims, many would be without hands and legs. They would be a burden to society as they would be unable to earn a living or compete on equal terms with others.

"Applying the laws equally to non-Muslims would be difficult as other ethnic and religious groups will not accept Islamic punishment."

Responding to a student's question as to whether this stand conflicted with Government policy on the integration of Islamic values into Malaysian society, Dr Mahathir said all factors should be considered.

"Any implementation of ***hudud*** laws would require a detached, non-partisan study by qualified people without political links. However, those making the decision now have vested interests.

"We would have a problem if fanatics believe them without understanding the basis of the religion. This is why we do not accept the idea of imnosine ***hudud*** laws, but instead try to explain our stand to the people."

Dr Mahathir said the integration of Islamic values was an ongoing exercise, but to fully achieve the goals would take time, and this would require effective methods such as persuasion rather than force.

"Any society that is not tolerant but only wants to punish severely will be an unhappy one."

During the meeting, Dr Mahathir fielded questions on topics ranging from the code of conduct for Rulers to foreign claims over Terumbu Layang-Layang and Pulau Batu Putih.