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Mahathir-Islam

WEAK UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS CAUSE OF BACKWARDNESS, SAYS DR

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today a weak understanding of true Islamic teachings was the reason why Muslims were weak and backward.

The teaching, for example, that knowledge other than that connected with religion was secular and unnecessary had made almost all Muslims remain backward and oppressed, he said.

At the same time, differences in the understanding of Islam had caused disunity and rivalry among Muslims when the religion emphasises that Muslims are brothers, he said when opening the building of the Institute for Islamic Understanding (Ikim) here.

Dr Mahathir said that in several Islamic countries, extremists were prepared to kill people of their own religion to overthrow the government, and that this had made Islamic countries vulnerable to foreign powers.

"Islam and Muslims do not gain anything at all from these differences in understanding which leads to the extremist actions," he said. -- more  
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The prime minister said that for several decades early in the 20th century, all Islamic countries and Muslims were colonies and this could continue if Islamic leaders did not revive the Islamic spirit.

The Islamic spirit alone, however, was insufficient for the progress of Muslims, he said, adding that immense knowledge and modern and technological know-how had to be acquired to fulfill the objective.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also referred to the rivalry and tension in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

He also said that this problem arose owing to differences in understanding or lack of understanding of Islam by non-Muslims and vice versa.

"Actually, almost all social problems are caused by differences in understanding of certain matters," he said.

Dr Mahathir said, for example, that the current state of relations between Malaysia and Britain resulted from a difference in the understanding of press freedom, adding that Malaysia interpreted it as the freedom to report the truth but the West interpreted it as the freedom to report lies.

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For Muslims, he said, their understanding of Islamic teachings depended on the interpretations and teachings as understood by teachers and "ulama" (religious elders) and this was influenced by the values and beliefs of society and certain interests.

"If society is not tolerant of other religions, the Quranic teachings on tolerance is not explained ... if there is any objective to be achieved, supportive teachings are selected for the purpose and in this way Muslims obtain only half the actual Islamic guidance," he said.

Dr Mahathir said differences in understanding among ulama on any problem and rule had caused disunity among Muslims, with the obvious being the existence of the "Sunni" and "Syiah" sects.

The existence of the "Syiah" and "Sunni" sects was not the end of the division, he said, adding that several "imam" in the two sects made various interpretations of the teachings so much so that the Muslims were further divided into groups.

"While many of these differences did not deviate from Islamic teachings, there are some which were far different from the teachings until they cannot be said to be from Islamic teachings," he said. -- more

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The situation became more acute because with the passage of time and as Muslims became more scattered, they were exposed more to non-Muslims in their countries and in countries they travelled to, he said.

Their relationship with non-Muslims ran into problems because they did not understand Islam's requirements in the matter while non-Muslims made their own interpretations which were often wrong and not in accordance with Islam, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that there usually was biased views of Muslims and Islam in non-Islamic countries and among non-Muslims, so much so that when Muslims were oppressed and brutally killed such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Israel, the majority of society regarded it as insignificant.

"On the contrary, when Muslims are unable to contain their emotions and react, they are branded terrorists," he said.

It was for this reason that when an Israeli Jew shot dead 50 Muslims in prayer and injured scores of others in Hebron, the United Nations did not condemn the action as terrorism until several weeks later, he said. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said that if non-Muslims were not influenced by the history of rivalry with Muslims and if they understood that Islam was a religion of peace and tolerance, they would not harbour misconceptions about Muslims.

On the setting up of Ikin, he said it was based on the awareness that many problems of Muslims resulted from the understanding and differences in understanding of Islamic teachings among Muslims and non-Muslims.

He said the institute had the role of not only determining that true Islamic teachings were accepted and disseminated to Muslims but also to ensure participation by non-Muslims in seminars organised by Ikin to enhance their understanding of the true fundamentals of Islam.

It is hoped that Ikin could rectify the misunderstanding of Islam, at least in Malaysia, and prove Islam's tolerance in relations with all quarters, he said. — Bernama

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