
Dr M on need to widen scope of religious studies

JOHOR BARU, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said widening the scope for religious studies and a deeper look at the inaccurate interpretations of Islam's demands on its followers could help build a better character among the younger generation.

The Prime Minister said this could also help youths reject improper behaviour while making them more educated and knowledgeable.

Dr Mahathir said: "Islamic education is so wide. It is not confined to religious matters alone. It encompasses a complete guide to life.

"It must be stressed that a nation's and the people's progress also depended on their deep understanding and knowledge in such disciplines as mathematics, science, technology and others which are often described as worldly.

"All these cannot be neglected if we want Muslims to accept Islam as the *Ad-din*, the way of life, that we are proud of."

The Prime Minister said this when he launched the National Islamic Education Congress at Kompleks Is-

nation's youths and their involvement in drug abuse, the *bohsia and lepak* problems and other bad habits.

He added that most of the youths affected by these problems are from the Muslim community. Surely the declining morals are not due to their religious beliefs, Dr Mahathir said.

He said it could not be denied that the morals of Muslim youths are lower than the non-Muslims'.

"We need to figure out the reasons why Islam did not become the preventive force in this instance as expected," he said.

The Prime Minister said these youths appear not to hold strongly to Islamic teachings, much less practise them. Their knowledge of Islamic teachings was also shallow and their faith weak.

They are so distant from the religion that they no longer are embarrassed by their ignorance, he said. He added that it could not be denied that their ignorance and attitude stemmed from the manner in which these teachings were conveyed to them.

Dr Mahathir said there could be weaknesses in the

lam here. The opening was followed by a laser and audio-visual show which traced the history of Islamic education introduced in schools in Johore in the 1800's.

Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (Johor), Tan Sri Khalil Yaakub (Pahang) and Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib (Perak) and Cabinet Ministers.

The ministers included Datuk Dr Sulaiman Daud (Education), Datuk Mohamed Rahmat (Information), Datuk Dr Yusof Nor (Public Enterprises), Datuk Syed Hamid Albar (Law) and Ghani Othman (Youth and Sports) together with several deputy Ministers and high ranking Government officials.

Dr Mahathir said society was witnessing declining morals among some of the

emphasis which led to the lack of effectiveness of Islamic teachings in schools.

He pointed out that religious upbringing for children began at home by parents. But if the knowledge among parents was inadequate, which in itself would affect the manner these teachings were conveyed, then their role would in turn become less effective.

Dr Mahathir said: "Furthermore, the family culture is also different compared to the old days when children were loyal and fearful of their parents. The children's exposure to foreign ways has made it difficult for parents to invoke fear among their children.

"The youths are also more free and cleverer than their parents when they (the parents) were growing up."

If parents were expected to be effective in their role,

then the emphasis on courses for couples wishing to marry should not just be on the rights of husbands and wives, but also on parenting skills as well, he said.

Such courses do not give enough attention to skills on bringing up children. Instead, they emphasis religious rules and regulations, proper praying methods, fasting and reading and understanding the Quran.

The Prime Minister said that even though the time allotted to religious classes in schools has been extended, their impact on curbing bad behaviour has not been easily seen.

Therefore, the contents of these classes needed to be deeply studied and analysed not just by religious experts but also by others such as child psychologists, he said.

Dr Mahathir said one's adherence to Islam should not

be governed or determined by fear of the punishment in the hereafter alone. For instance, the prohibition against liquor should be adhered to not just because it is sinful but also because this could lead to loss of one's dignity, illnesses and even death, he said.

The Prime Minister said the Muslim community continued to give the impression that only matters pertaining to prayers were important, and that anything related to them were unimportant and could even be against Islam.

This did not appeal to the younger generation who felt that Islam was too restrictive. The younger generation, in seeking entertainment, may feel that the burden of religion would be too heavy on them, he said.

Dr Mahathir urged religious personalities to

strongly support and take an active part in the Rakan Muda programme. They should help prove that Islam is not a difficult religion, not a burden and that it is suitable for all times and climates.

This would help to draw the younger generation to the religion, Dr Mahathir said. Aided by efforts to strengthen their faith and belief, attempts to arrest the declining moral among the younger generation would show faster results, he said.

Muhyiddin, in his speech, said hosting the congress in Johor showed the commitment of the State Government to ensure that there is an appropriate and effective system of Islamic education in schools to nurture a new generation of youngsters who are responsible and development oriented.

He said Islamic education was a process to make a Muslim a complete person and be ready to take on a more responsible role in the family and society.

He cited how Prophet Muhammad's religious education programme had transformed Umar Al-Khattab from a fierce man who hated Islam to one who became responsible and fought for and protected the religion.

He added that people's character could be moulded through a well-planned education process to ensure they became responsible citizens.

He added that the time has come to give a new orientation to the Islamic education process, including taking all measures to improve the process and its implementation.