

# Reveal the true face of Islam, urges Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The time has come for Muslim countries to correct the image of Islam and Muslims in view of a variety of unfortunate actions by extremists and deviationists who have been lumped as Islamic fundamentalists by others, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said this and the failures of some Islamic countries to achieve stability, peace and progress had at the moment made the image of Muslim nations very much wanting.

Speaking at a dinner he hosted for visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and his delegation, Dr Mahathir said Lebanon and Malaysia were in very good positions to correct the image by showing true Islamic tolerance and justice for others who were not of the Muslim faith.

"And also through our capacity to govern and govern well a pluralistic society.

We hope that we can work together on the task of revealing the true face of Islam and Muslims," he said.

He said Lebanon before the civil war was very well developed and among the wealthiest countries in the Middle East until some segments of the population wanted more for themselves and before anyone realised what was happening there was a full-scale civil war.

"Beirut was destroyed. Lebanon's rich economy was in shambles. People were killed and wounded. There was no security for anyone. Fear stalked the streets of Beirut and other parts of Lebanon.

"When the Taif Peace Agreement was finally signed five years ago, Lebanon was not even a shadow of its former self. We here were saddened by the tragedy.

"A heavy price was paid by all the Lebanese people from all segments of society,

the Muslims of various sects, the Christians and the Palestinian refugees ... no one had gained anything more than they had before the war. Indeed everyone lost almost everything," he said.

Dr Mahathir hoped that others in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world would understand the futility of violent conflicts and terrorism as instruments of correcting the ills of society, be they social, political or religious.

He said unfortunately, the lessons of Lebanon had taught the selfish, fanatics and terrorists nothing and there were still conflicts everywhere with religious fanatics and extremists still trying to bring down Governments by violence while Governments, as expected, reacted with equal violence resulting in the people suffering.

He said Muslims everywhere were derided and

made the butt of cynical jokes, adding that "it will seem that Islam is the religion of chaos and backwardness, of intolerance and needless violence."

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Malaysia had to fight communist terrorists for many years and in 1969 there were rioting and violence in Kuala Lumpur, with many deaths and loss of property.

"The world Press reported that Malaysia was finished. Fortunately, Malaysians came to their senses quickly.

"Since then they have eschewed confrontations and violence. Together they built up the country which you see today. They now share much more wealth, peace and stability," he said.

He added that Malaysia and Lebanon's experiences had been good lessons to the two countries and would serve as good lessons for

other Muslim and non-Muslim countries which were now facing civil wars, violence and terrorism simply because people thought they could create a better world or better Governments if they brought down the Government of the day regardless of the law.

On the issue of peace in West Asia, he said the progress of the peace process depended on the commitment of all parties involved to implement the provisions agreed.

"The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied territories is certainly against the spirit of the agreement," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia would urge Israel to demonstrate its sincerity to implement the remaining central issues including the return of Golan Heights and withdrawal from Southern Lebanon to maintain the momentum of the peace process.