

06 DEC 1996

Mahathir-Islam

ISLAMIC COUNTRIES COULD BE FRIENDS WITH ISRAEL, SAYS PM

By: Zulkefli Salleh

MEDINA, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- Islamic countries should not fight against Israel or among themselves in seeking to resolve the Arab-Israeli crisis, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that history had shown that Muslims and Jews did not wage an all-out war against each other to the extent that they could never be friends.

"We should consider the consequences of being at war in resolving the Arab-Israeli crisis," he said at a gathering of Malaysian students here.

Dr Mahathir said that during the Islamic rule in Spain, the Jews chose to remain in the country but left to live in Islamic countries when the Christians took over the country.

He said that Malaysia had adopted a stand that it would not establish relations with Israel for as long as the regime refuses to observe conditions of the peace accord with the Arabs.

Malaysia felt that the occupation of Arab land to set up Israel by the West was unfair and unjust, he added.

The Prime Minister said that Malaysia's stand was not as tough as the stand taken by some Islamic countries as it believed that the Arab-Israeli crisis could be resolved by peaceful means and not necessarily through war.

He said that President Yasser Arafat had sought his views before signing the peace accord with Israel and the Prime Minister supported the move taken by the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

"We will not ask other people to go to war and merely clap our hands while others die," he said when asked by a student on Malaysia's stand over the West Asia conflict.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a four-day official visit to Saudi Arabia, was also asked on the government's stand on religious education, Vision 2020 and Muslim unity especially in Malaysia.

He said that those with religious education had been acknowledged by the government as having just as important a role in the nation-building agenda.

"Those with religious education are the anchor so that we will not forget our past in pursuing progress and development," he said.

"We want to acquire knowledge and achieve progress like in the West but we will not neglect the religion to the extent of forgetting the past and adopting the attitude that science has the answers to all life's problems," he added.

Dr Mahathir said that the Western civilisation is in the threshold of destruction because they ignored religious values and Malaysia should never repeat this mistake.

He also reminded those with religious education to respect and work together with others with knowledge in other fields.

"Let us discard the attitude of undermining the Islamic conviction of others when there are differences in opinion over ways in dealing with issues and the interest of the ummah," he said.

He said that Islam advocates consultation in dealing with problems.

On the request for computers by Malaysian students in Saudi Arabia, he said that Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak would be asked to consider it.

Earlier, the Prime Minister visited the Kiblatain Mosque here where Prophet Muhammad received divine revelation that the kiblatain (the direction

faced by Muslims in prayers) be changed from the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to the Kaabah in Mecca.

He also visited the Quba Mosque here, the first mosque opened by Prophet Muhammad, and visited Mount Uhud, where the Muslims lost in a war due to greed and conceit.

He is scheduled to leave for Riyadh, the royal capital, before proceeding to Mecca to perform the umrah.

Tonight, Dr Mahathir will be entertained to dinner by Crown Prince Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al Saud.

Dr Mahathir and Crown Prince Abdullah will lead their respective delegations in bilateral talks to further enhance cooperation and understanding between both countries. -- BERNAMA

ZKS RM