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Mahathir-Islam

MUSLIM COUNTRIES MUST RECOVER SUPERIORITY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Muslim countries must recover their strength and superiority in all fields if they want the world to once again respect Islam and hold its teachings in high esteem.

He said among other things they must recover strength and superiority in modern knowledge, administrative skills, the conduct of their relation with themselves and with others, industry and commerce.

"Non-Muslims cannot be impressed by what we tell them will be our glorious life in the hereafter, especially when they see us weak and cringing before the worldly powers, disunited, even fighting each other and generally not practising what we loudly proclaim to be the teachings of Islam," he said when opening the Regional Islamic Dakwah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Riseap) 9th general assembly and 15th anniversary celebration at a hotel here.

Dr Mahathir said the best form of dakwah was to demonstrate through practice the goodness of Islam, the tolerance and sympathy for the less fortunate members of the ummah and also those not of Islamic faith, the peace and stability and the prosperity of well-administered Muslim nations.

"For the faithful, the rewards and punishments in the afterlife will be meaningful but it is too much to expect those who do not even believe in the afterlife to be awed by hell and heaven and to appreciate Islam because of it," he said.

The Prime Minister said the success of the Muslims and their nations would prove more convincing of the essential goodness of Islam than all the preaching about Islamic teachings and beliefs, especially when Muslims often do not practise what they preach.

"If Muslims believe that they can be as good as others in all fields and they set out to achieve this, then they will surely be able to bring a return of their past glory and greatness.

"Insyah-Allah, if we Muslims are dedicated to explaining Islam in this easily understandable way, through deeds and demonstrable achievements, we will succeed in our mission.

"We will all be true missionaries, not just by calling upon all to do good and reject evil, but by actually doing good and rejecting evil ourselves," he said.

Dr Mahathir used a major portion of his speech to elaborate on the new approach to dakwah being undertaken by Riseap, called "Da'wah Bil Hal", which stresses on action -- good deeds which anyone with the right attitude and inclination could do to help his immediate neighbours and fellow men in times of distress or trouble.

The objective of the approach is not proselytisation as much as it is to display the true teachings of Islam and its practice. This is to help correct the wrong impressions of Islam that prevail among non-Muslims in particular.

Dr Mahathir said presently even Muslims were under the mistaken impression that their help and sympathy should be confined only to Muslims and that the distress and misfortunes of non-Muslims were not of concern to them.

"On the other hand, Muslims are not against receiving help and sympathy from non-Muslims. Indeed in many instances we find only non-Muslims are actively helping Muslims while Muslims apparently ignore the fate of the

co-religionists," he said.

The Prime Minister said this kind of attitude did not give Islam and Muslims a good image and Muslims must know that it was their duty to help other Muslims and that the misfortunes of non-Muslims too should attract their sympathy and active help.

"While Da'wah Bil Hal may not be intended to proselytise, it should at least help to generate greater understanding and appreciation of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Muslim civilisation was at one time highly respected as Muslims were wealthy and very learned in all fields, including the sciences and mathematics, navigation and astronomy, engineering and construction and Muslim countries were united under one Khalifah and were powerful.

But then came those who preached exclusive dedication to akhirat (hereafter), condemned this world as being created by Allah for the infidels and as a result of this Muslims began to lose interest in learning other than those subjects designated as religious, he added.

"Today they are totally weak, dependent upon and often subservient to the big powers. Gone are the glorious days of the Muslim Empire, and with it the respect for Islam by the non-Muslims. Indeed some Muslims have also lost their faith in Islam," he said.

Riseap, an Islamic organisation to serve Muslim minority communities in the Southeast Asia and the Pacific, was established in 1980 as the result of a conference here attended by various Muslim organisations and institutions from most countries in the region.

That conference was jointly organised by the Muslim Welfare Organisation of Malaysia (Perkim) and the Muslim World League (Rabitah Al-Alam Al-Islami).

The first president of Riseap was the first Prime Minister of Malaysia the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj and after the Tunku stepped down in 1988, Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud took over and he has been leading the organisation since.

More than 100 people are attending the five-day meeting.

A total of 50 Muslim organisations in 19 countries in the region, including Australia, Brunei, Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand and Western Samoa, are affiliated to Riseap. -- BERNAMA

AFY YBY