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Admit problems, PM tells Muslims

Kamarul Yunus; Adeline Ong

THE first step to solving social problems plaguing the Muslim community in the country is to admit that there is a problem, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Speaking for about an hour at a special meeting with the religious authorities in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Dr Mahathir said it is easier to correct oneself than to correct others.

Dr Mahathir said the various barriers implemented by the Government to reduce social ills may not be successful without strong personal defence within individuals.

"Focus should be given to the development of a strong personal defence which is capable of resisting negative conduct," he said, adding that the various government efforts like tightening of regulations and reducing the number of entertainment spots can only solve part of the problem.

"Muslims should not point fingers at any party or give the excuse that social ills stem from the nation's development. It is shallow to think that economic development and modern technology causes social ills," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that in a borderless world, the Muslim community cannot be separated from the current happenings and situations in the world.

"There is no one Islamic country in the world that is truly free from the non-Muslims and Muslims cannot blame the technological age and the Internet which provides information.

"The fact that Muslims and the Malay community are facing more social problems and moral degradation than non-Muslims tells us something. The reasons will have to be studied and analysed so that a solution can be found," he said.

Dr Mahathir said 56 per cent of the social problems plaguing the country affects Muslims compared with 28 per cent which is attributable to the Chinese and 10 per cent Indians.

"The blame cannot be placed on the comfortable lifestyle because non-Muslims in Malaysia also enjoy a comfortable lifestyle but the level of social problems and moral degradation among them are not so rampant (as among the Muslims)."

He added that Malaysia is considered by other Islamic countries as a successful and developed Islamic nation that does not lack in religious convictions.

"Malaysia has received lots of praises and there are countries which are interested in using Malaysia as an example since they consider Malaysia's development as extraordinary," he said.

Dr Mahathir also questioned the Muslim community whether they were satisfied with the level of Islamic faith by just seeing a filled mosque.

He added that Muslims say Islam is a way of life but many focus on the rituals aspect of Islam rather than its lifestyle.

He explained that there exists a situation where parents blame teachers for the increasing social problems that is happening, without realising that they have a part to play too.

"The Government has made lots of efforts to increase Islamic education but it is still insufficient to stop social problems. Religious teachers too play an important role in educating and cultivating the young but parents must advise their children at home," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, were briefed by the National Unity and Social Development Ministry secretary-general Datuk Dr Zainul Ariff Hussain on the social problems faced by the community.

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