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Mahathir-date

AGREE ON COMMON RAYA DATE, MAHATHIR TELLS ASEAN

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has welcomed the endeavour by Asean member countries to reach consensus on Islamic matters including fixing common dates for Raya Puasa and Raya Haji.

Prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said such consensus was vital because sophisticated transportation and information technology available today transcended national boundaries.

"If there is an understanding (among Asean) on the meaning of the Quran, I'm confident we can carry out our efforts to defend ourselves and redeem our dignity," he said.

The prime minister said this during a dialogue after opening an international conference here on reforms and challenges facing Muslims in the region in the 21st century.

Dr Mahathir said there was now a mechanism which could avoid countries in the region from observing different dates for Hari Raya.

In the context of sighting the moon to fix the commencing and the end of the Muslim fasting month and the daily fasting time, he said, there were also now scientific methods using satellites which could determine sunrise and sunset times and the sun's movement.

The prime minister said there was a need for Muslims to agree on the lessons to be learnt from the Quran in the present context.

For example, he said, when the Quran calls for Muslims to "get your horses and swords ready to deter your enemies" it did not mean that the present day society should still use swords and horses in battles.

"It's unlikely that 1,400 years ago, the Quranic verse refers to arming Muslims with warships, rockets and fighter jets because the pagan Arabs would then denounce Prophet Muhammad as insane," Dr Mahathir said.

In the context of today's world, it would be relevant for Muslims to acquire knowledge of the sciences and electronics to enhance their expertise in defence studies and "not to keep horses," he said.

The prime minister also witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Ikim (the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding) and Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia (the Indonesian confederation of Islamic intellectuals) on collaboration in regional training and education.-- BERNAMA

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