

22 MAR 1997

Mahathir-Award

DR M HAILS COOPERATION AMONG MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS IN MALAYSIA

By: Amin Husaini Harun

RIYADH, March 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight paid tribute to Malaysian Muslims and non-Muslims for their tolerance and respect for each other that has helped to make the country stable and prosperous.

He said Malaysia and its people, without their tolerance, sensitivity and respect for each other, will not be what it is today - a multi-racial, multi-religious, yet politically stable and economically prosperous nation.

In his acceptance speech on the conferment of this year's King Faizal International Prize for service to Islam, Dr Mahathir said the prize was a great honour to Malaysia and a recognition of the achievement of its people, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The award was presented by Prince Sultan Ibn Abdel Aziz, on behalf of King Al-Malik Fahd, at a ceremony held at the Al-Khozama centre here. The prince is also Saudi Arabia's Second Deputy Prime Minister.

The award, which carries with it a certificate, a commemorative 200 gramme gold medallion and a cash award of 750,000 riyals (RM500,000), was created in 1976 in memory of King Faisal ibn Abdel Aziz after his assassination by one of his nephews.

The King Faisal Foundation, in conferring the award, noted among others of Dr Mahathir's wisdom and moderation during his premiership which reflected the magnanimity and forbearance of Islam and his policies which have fostered rapport and cooperation between Malaysian Muslims and non-Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said the achievement of Muslims in Malaysia today were laid 900 years ago by Muslim traders from Hadramant, whose exemplary behaviours and attitudes had influenced the Malays into embracing Islam.

"The traders were not just devout Muslims but were also kind and charitable. They were simply good people who reflect the true teaching of Islam," he said.

Had the first Muslims who landed in Malaysia constantly fought each other and slit each other's throats, even if they prayed and fast, the ancestors of today's Malays would have rejected Islam, he added.

Dr Mahathir said that since the first conversion into Islam, the progress achieved by the Malays in the arts and sciences, in the system of government, the concept of justice and the rule of law, have been the result of adhering to the teachings of Islam.

"We have managed to remain faithful and committed to Islam, to use it to guide us so that in our desire to make material progress we have not forsaken religion or relegated it to the background.

"We believe that our material progress is in accord with and in full support of the teachings of Islam, in particular regarding the brotherhood of Muslims and the need for us to be strong so we may be able to defend ourselves and our faith against those who wish to separate us from our religion and destroy it.

"To us political stability, good government, knowledge of all the sciences and technology, material wealth and modern sophistication are all parts of the process of strengthening the Muslim ummah, so as to defend successfully the faith," said Dr Mahathir.

"This is our faith and our creed in Malaysia we do not ask to be complimented or to be condemned by anyone on this earth. Allah SWT will be

our judge and in the hereafter we will receive our just rewards or our punishments," he added.

"No one, but no one should presume that they, and they alone are privy to the day of judgement to what will be Allah's judgement on us in the akhirat (hereafter) only Allah SWT knows."

Other recipients of the King Faisal awards were Dr AbdulKarim Zaidan Baheej Al-Aani of Iraq (Islamic Studies); Dr James Francis Gosla of Canada, Dr Colen Louis Masters of Australia and Dr Conald Trangut of Germany (Medicine) and Dr Karl Weimann and Dr Erick Cornell, both of the US (Physics).

The Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Malaysia's Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman and Malaysian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sapii Abu Samah were present at the ceremony.

So far, 111 laureates from 31 countries have been awarded the King Faisal International Prizes in the fields of service to Islam, Islamic studies, Arabic Literature, science and medicine since 1977.

-- BERNAMA

AHH SK