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ISA won't be used against those who label others as apostates

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the Government would not invoke the Internal Security Act against those who cause a split in Islam by branding others as apostates.

Instead, the Prime Minister said the Government preferred to advise and educate this group.

"We feel this approach would be more successful in addressing the problem," he said. "This is because labelling others as apostates is caused by a lack of understanding and confusion about the religion".

Dr Mahathir said this at a regional conference on reformation and challenges faced by Muslims at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia.

Also present were Indonesian Minister of Research and Technology Prof Dr Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, who delivered an address, and Ikim chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid.

Dr Mahathir was earlier asked by a participant whether the Government intend to formulate new laws against Muslims who label others as apostates.

The participant also urged the Government to invoke the ISA to bring the problem under control.

Reiterating the Government's stand that misguided people should be educated and informed of their mistakes, Dr Mahathir said invoking the ISA was convenient but he felt it could lead to problems.

"If this is used, then (using force) will become an approach," he said.

"That is why in some Islamic countries, there exist groups branded as terrorists because they resort to force when they disagree or when others refuse to accept their views."

Dr Mahathir said if the Government was seen to use force in solving problems, eventually it would be confronted with violent opposition from the people.

Islam advocated that decisions should not be made hastily but after careful deliberations and consultation, he said.

"We cannot simply label others as apostates," he said. "No doubt there are this type of people around but before they are categorised as one, there are specific steps and process which have to be adhered to.

"We have to judge the matter carefully and in a just and fair manner before any decision is made."

Responding to a question on the role of the mufti, Dr Mahathir reiterated that fatwa (religious decrees) should not be made arbitrarily but after careful deliberation, including consultation with experts on non-religious matters.

"Take for example the issue of cloning. Views from those in the field of medicine and science need to be obtained before any fatwa is issued."

On the need for women to be represented in the National Fatwa Council, Dr Mahathir said this was necessary as men would not know all the problems faced by women.

"Half of the population of this country and the world are women," he said. "They have demonstrated various capabilities and we need them in nation-building."

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the attack on ringgit by George Soros and whether the Islamic world should produce its own Soros to counter currency manipulations.

The Prime Minister said the incident was a good lesson to Malaysia as it demonstrated how one powerful man could destroy the economies of other countries.

On whether Asean countries had the capabilities to act like Soros, he replied: "We have among us rich people but they are not capable... on the other hand, there are those who are capable but they do not have the money."

Realising the danger of people like Soros, Dr Mahathir said efforts must be carried out to categorise currency manipulations as an international crime.

Asean countries must cooperate because the United States did not view Soros' action as a crime.

"But look at the time when the US was crippled with problems arising from the petroleum industry being monopolised by one man," he said. "A law was formulated making such an activity a crime."

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