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Mahathir-Islam

MAHATHIR WARNS NATION OF MOUNTING INTOLERANCE

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the 1997 Umno general assembly here today reminding Muslims of mounting intolerance towards those not subscribing to views only perceived as Islamic.

If left unchecked, such a prejudice only spelled great danger for the country, Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, told 1,905 delegates to the three-day assembly.

Umno, he said, has to safeguard the true teachings of Islam before Muslims in Malaysia suffer a catastrophic fate as happened to a certain Muslim state now incapacitated and bullied by foreign powers, he said.

"In some other Islamic countries, fanatical groups have no qualms about killing fellow Muslims just to be in power and have their views upheld," he said in his presidential address.

The situation in Malaysia has reached a stage where such zealots have started slandering and branding others as apostates, he said.

The main theme of Dr Mahathir's address was redeeming the Malay dignity and the sanctity of Islam.

Leaders of other parties in the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, corporate figures and members of the diplomatic corps were among those also present at the assembly opening at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Mahathir said he was aware that his remarks on the matter would not please many, including Umno members themselves.

But, he said, he had to make it known all the same because the intolerance and the attendant problems were growing.

"All along we don't have extremist groups which attack and slaughter Muslims who do not subscribe to their preachings. But it is increasingly evident that there are already those inclined towards such extremism, those who prefer Muslims to avoid the minor sins but commit the bigger ones," he said.

The prime minister said this trend must be checked and Umno, as a responsible ruling party, must be bold enough to neutralise such an unhealthy phenomenon.

He said allowing extremist groups to flourish would risk turning Malaysia into a strife-torn and fragmented nation characterised by anarchy, corruption and taken full advantage of by the super-powers.

Several Muslim countries are living examples of such states, he said.

Dr Mahathir said he found it perplexing that while leaders of other Muslim countries marvelled at the country's moderate Islamic approaches, certain local groups, on the other hand, preferred extremist ways which have rendered many Muslim nations so problem-ridden that they could not be developed at all.

"They (leaders of other Islamic countries) are in fact disillusioned by the actions and views of extremist groups among their own people..too extreme that they terrorise in the name of Islam and preoccupy themselves with the trivialities of their societies," he said.

Those leaders have envisaged their own people carrying out Islamic policies and practices similar to Malaysia's, he said.

Dr Mahathir attributed intolerance among Muslims to the wrong priority given to the approach in enforcing the syaria rather than the objectives behind a particular ruling.

He said today's Muslims were fighting each other and remained weak and

divided because of the "wrong emphasis on the approach rather than the objective."

Muslims could not be bothered about who were their real enemies but instead would regard fellow Muslims as their adversaries to be ridiculed for being less-Islamic, he said.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on Muslims' attire and exposure of the aurat which remained a cause for concern among Malaysian Muslims.

He said the Arabian attire during the times of the Prophet Muhammad and decades henceforth was donned by all Arabs, be they Muslims or Christians.

This dress was made into an Islamic symbol but at the same time, those wearing it were often at war with each other, totally ignoring Islam's more important call for brotherly Muslims, he said.

Such was also the case with covering of the women's aurat (alluring parts of their anatomy).

The objective, he said, was to prevent the overly lustful and agnostic Arabs during the times of the Prophet from abducting and raping women from other tribes and causing endless tribal wars.

In Malaysia, the notion was that, since Islam forbids exposure of the aurat, those flouting the ruling deserved severe punishment, he said.

"This does mean that the Quran is wrong. It's us who are wrong because we're more concerned about not exposing the aurat and but not about preventing sexual crimes, whereas that is Islam's main aim, " he said.

Dr Mahathir said present day Muslims stressed too much on sartorial and other Islamic symbols such as sporting beards and goatees that more serious matters such as Muslim brotherhood and resilience get to become secondary.

He also said Muslims were divided into sects and groups by preachings and interpretations of Islamic teachings by those conversant in Arabic.

But religious knowledge and proficiency in Arabic alone would not guarantee that their interpretations were accurate and true.

"In fact, for certain selfish ends, they often misinterpret Islam teachings," he added. -- BERNAMA

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