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PM calls for reformation of thinking among 'trapped' Muslims

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - In the face of the 21st Century and information age, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for a reformation of thinking among Muslims still trapped within teachings which are not truly Islamic.

"Reformation should emphasise on values based on true Islamic teachings, free from confusing beliefs and interpretations not based on the Quran and hadis," the Prime Minister said.

Obviously, religious knowledge has to be pursued, he said, but there was no reason for Muslims to merely specialise in this discipline.

"Should Muslim scholars become experts in religious fields alone," he asked, "and none on learning other disciplines which can help bring progress and save Muslims?"

The Prime Minister was speaking at a regional conference themed "Towards the 21st Century: Reformation and Challenges for Muslims in the region", organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding of Malaysia.

Also present were Indonesian Minister of Research and Technology Prof Dr Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie and IKIM chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid.

Dr Mahathir said the rejection of knowledge considered to be unIslamic and prohibitive to Muslims caused the downfall of the Turkish and Arab empires.

Due to Muslims' lack of knowledge in disciplines like mathematics, science, administration and development, they failed to counter problems brought about by a rapidly changing world, he said.

After 1,400 years of Islamic history, Dr Mahathir said Muslims had been exposed to a variety of teachings ranging from narrow interpretations which reject the present world outright to one that alienates Islam and accepting secularism.

"As a result, Muslims became very confused," he said. "Some lost their minds and their way in the process."

On differences in opinion and teachings, Dr Mahathir said while deviationists must return to the true path, it must be done through musyawarah (consensus) and not through pressure, oppression and injustice.

"If an agreement cannot be reached, tolerance and brotherhood must be practised," he said. "Attempts through the use of force that causes disunity and never-ending riots must be avoided."

Stressing the importance of learning from history, Dr Mahathir said: "To plan for the future, we must first look backwards so that we know where we came from."

"If not, we may actually be moving backwards even though we feel we are progressing forward."

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir said this did not mean that all accurate answers could be found in Islamic history.

"But we may be able to learn why strategies and approaches adopted by Muslims were so successful in the early stages but are now no longer suitable and have brought negative results."

Alluding to the glory and achievements attained by the Muslim world, especially the 100 years after the hijra, Dr Mahathir said the rise and fall of Islam and its followers in history had a close connection with the religion they practised.

"But why was it that when the ignorant Arabs adopted Islam, they became such a dynamic group of followers?" he asked.

The answer, Dr Mahathir said, was because as time passed, more and more teachings not based on Islam had surfaced and were circulated.

Also, more Muslims and their leaders were involved in power struggles, each declaring that they were fighting for Islam.

Dr Mahathir said progress and achievements of the Islamic empire in its early days were due to the fact that there were not many differing interpretations of the religion.

"There were not many false hadis," he said, "and not many shallow fatwas which could confuse followers."

These Muslims, unhindered from furthering their worldly studies, were pioneered by others, even translated these studies and made extensive research on their own which surpassed those of other civilisations.

"They invented studies on astronomy, algebra, logarithm, medicine, navigation and various other branches of mathematics," he said. "They were so skilled in the use of metal that Damascus was known to have the best steel for weapons."

Dr Mahathir said study on all this knowledge was made possible then because there were no prohibitions on them or instructions that only Islamic studies could be pursued.

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