

14 AUG 1997

Mahathir-Apostate

PM HITS OUT AT CERTAIN MUFTIS FOR "APOSTATE" ALLEGATION

JITRA, 14 Ogos (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described as extreme the allegation by certain muftis that he has almost committed apostasy after criticising the way three Muslim beauty contest participants were arrested.

"The focus is not on all muftis but only on the fatwa issued by certain muftis that anyone who did not take their fatwa seriously is almost an apostate," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir, who is the member of parliament for Kubang Pasu, was addressing his constituents at Dewan Jitra here.

"We respect muftis for the rulings they make but if the mufti takes an action not in line with Islam, can't we criticise that," he said.

He said he was accused of almost being guilty of apostasy for hitting out at the manner in which three Muslim women who participated in a beauty contest were arrested by Selangor religious officials recently.

"People say I have almost become an apostate for criticising the beauty contest," he said.

Dr Mahathir clarified that he did not criticise the contest but the way the three women were arrested and handcuffed.

"I did not say don't take action or don't arrest. Yes, they (the three women) did something wrong but there's no need to handcuff them.

"If they are thieves.. then handcuff them," he said, stressing that Islam required that there be fairness.

Dr Mahathir said when an extreme action was taken what was affected was the image of Islam.

"They (the muftis) can issue fatwa .... anyone who opposes are labelled as apostates, but the muftis can revoke fatwa. Accussing others of committing apostasy is an extreme action," he said.

Dr Mahathir also hit out at certain people who call themselves ulamaks just because they have joined ulamak associations and paid their fees.

"If one becomes an ulamak by merely joining the association and paying the fess then anyone can become an ulamak just like that," he said.

The Prime Minister said ulamaks should not think that only religious knowledge was important for upholding Islam.

Other fields such as medical, engineering, defence and information technology also play an important role in upholding Islam, he said.

At the gathering, Dr Mahathir also said the government found that Bumiputeras did not benefit from opportunities created by the government to help the community because they were not prepared to make use of the opportunities.

The opportunities include scholarships and government policies, the Prime Minister said.

He said the average income of other communities such as the Chinese and Indians was higher than Bumiputeras because they were willing to work hard, study and make use of the opportunities available.

"We create the oportunities and policies to reduce the gap between Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras but if Bumiputeras are not prepared, it's difficult for us to help them," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the country was currently under attack by individuals who were seeking to bring down the value of the ringgit.

"If we are not able to develop the country, we will be colonised again, not by a foreign country but by the wealth of certain people," he said.

Before the gathering, Dr Mahathir visited stalls in Kepala Batas, Medan Selera Tanah Merah in Bandar Darul Aman and Aked Mara in Jitra, all within the Kubang Pasu constituency. -- BERNAMA

JM SK