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The misguided ones

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THE Government is not in favour of using force or the Internal Security Act (ISA) in dealing with apostates (murtad) and zealots who divide and label other Muslims as murtad.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it is better to opt for a subtle approach to help these misguided group of people to return to the right path.

"We are not keen to use ISA except for drug trafficking cases. Opting for ISA in dealing with apostate problem is like using force. We prefer a counselling approach to help them," he added.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a question by a participant of the conference in Kuala Lumpur on challenges and reforms facing Muslims in the region in the 21st century.

The Prime Minister said the perception that using force can be the solution to the apostate problem is a misunderstood approach because Islam encourages persuasive methods.

"We always think that the easiest is to implement a law to tackle a problem. This is a misunderstood approach of handling the matter. We can use verbal method to give explanation and be sympathetic towards the apostates," he added.

Dr Mahathir said any use of force can backfire and give birth to terrorist groups like what happened in some Islamic countries. The terrorism surfaces because the groups feel that others are condemning their interpretation of Islam.

"If the Government tries to use this approach, the people may retaliate hence it may lose their support. This would be even worse because administration of the country would be made more difficult." On zealots who label other Muslims as murtad without justification, he said they themselves may end-up as one.

"This does not mean there is no murtad in Malaysia. There are, but to determine them would require specific methods. Do not abuse gatherings to accuse others as oppostate. That is not Islamic. The religion looks into details and pass judgement in a fair manner."

Commenting on the mufti's role, Dr Mahathir said the mufti institution is aimed at eradicating the Muslims's doubts on Islamic religious rulings (fatwa).

He said however, any issuance of fatwa requires discussions with ulamaks and experts from the related fields, adding that it is not merely limited to those with indepth knowledge in syariah alone.

"For example, in the case of medical, of course the experts in the medical field are referred to when making a fatwa. Take the case of cloning for instance, it is important for crops," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government is not sidelining the muftis instead it wants their role to be in line with Syariah law.

He added that feedbacks from female society are also needed in issuing fatwa because they are also affected whenever a religious ruling is made by the muftis.

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