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PM: Muslims must widen knowledge in all fields

Badrul Hisham Mahzan

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Muslims must widen their knowledge in all fields, including religion, by conducting research.

The Prime Minister said the world saw how highly-knowledgeable Muslims were successful and able to build an empire of 800 years.

Speaking at the opening of Institut Profesional Baitulmal's new campus in Kampung Pandan, he said Islam required the people to upgrade their knowledge in all fields.

"Lack of knowledge is not part of the culture of Muslims. Even during the Islamic period previously, Muslims had a higher level of knowledge than others."

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir also launched the Federal Territory Mosque Development Foundation and a book on mosques.

Also present were his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, who is also chairman of the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Council.

Commenting on a book on the Islamic era in Spain that he had read, Dr Mahathir said Muslims under the leadership of Abdul Rahman II and III brought progress to the country because they were knowledgeable in many fields.

However, after the reign of Abdul Rahman III, disputes and animosity arose among them because of views that knowledge should be confined to religion.

This, he said, led to many of them having contradictory interpretations on Islam and some even went to war over them.

"Some had sought help from enemies of Islam and as a result, the Islamic empire in Spain became weaker and backward, and the last Islamic empire, Granada, was defeated by the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella.

"That's the fate of those who are weak and do not have knowledge (in other fields) although well versed in Islam."

Dr Mahathir said there was no reason why Muslims in this country could not progress because opportunities to acquire knowledge were expanding.

He suggested that funds raised through Baitulmal, a Muslim endowment body, and zakat (tithe) be used to enhance knowledge among Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said many Muslims could now afford to donate a lot of money to build mosques and for other similar purposes.

He also urged Muslims to create opportunities for non-Muslims to mix with them so that they would have a better understanding of Islam.

This, he said, would help to correct the impression given by the foreign media that all Muslims were terrorists or extremists.

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