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Non-Muslims' contributions to stability

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The understanding, tolerance and co-operation shown by non-Muslims in efforts taken to help improve the economy of Muslims and Bumiputeras has helped to contribute to the country's political stability, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

When the Government announced that it wanted to restructure society by helping Bumiputeras, most of whom are Muslims, to improve their economic lot to be on par with non-Muslims, the latter supported it and worked together to help achieve this, Dr Mahathir said.

He was speaking at a dialogue with participants and observers of the international seminar on The Role of Islamic Civilisation in Fostering Inter-Religious Understanding at the Institute of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia (Ikim) here.

Dr Mahathir was replying to Pas vice-president Mustafa Ali, who wanted to know the outstanding contributions of non-Muslims in the development of Muslims in Malaysia.

The Prime Minister said: "If they are intolerant, they can very well do a lot of damage to our plans to bring up the Muslims. If we fail to improve the economy of the Muslims, the Muslims will feel bitter against the non-Muslims. There will be tension and the country will not be able to develop and prosper.

"But the non-Muslims, realising that it is better for Muslims to have their share of wealth, have not opposed attempts to bring up the Muslims. That is their contribution towards the stability of this country."

Dr Mahathir said if non-Muslims preferred to rise in rebellion and support terrorists in the jungle, "we would have our hands full in trying to defend ourselves."

"The country would be like Kosovo and Lebanon," he said.

In fact, there would not be any democratic election as the country would be in a state of war, he said.

Dr Mahathir said it would be wrong to suggest that non-Muslims had not contributed to the country's well-being, though he noted that certain people tried very hard to create dissent.

"These people say that Muslims who work with non-Muslims are infidels...but now that is no longer mentioned because they realise they too have to work with non-Muslims," he said.

To another question by Mustafa on whether the Prime Minister's statement in his keynote address on Muslim students being isolated from non-Muslim students in the universities was a "new finding", the Prime Minister said the isolation was the work of politically-inclined people, including lecturers.

"Their idea is to influence students so that when they leave the universities, they will dislike the Government we have now."

Some students who finished their studies abroad worked with Government establishments and propagated isolation among students to serve the interest of some politicians, he said.

"We cannot expect the Ministry (of Education) to counter everything that is being done under our eyes, so you have to put up with it. Of course, if we act, it will be reported in the foreign Press that this Government is oppressive. That will contribute towards the success of certain political parties."

On the quality of ulama, Dr Mahathir said he respected the "real ulama,"

the one who is interested in the religion as propagated in the Quran and hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad).

For someone to become a "pewaris nabi" (successor to the Prophet), he must have certain qualities which qualified him to be an ulama.

"Here in Malaysia, anybody who graduated from the university with Islamic studies and join an association, is immediately called an ulama. I can't accept such people as ulama.

"I accept Imam Shafie and Imam Ghazali (famed Muslim scholars) as ulama. In this day, it is difficult to identify an ulama and yet we have everybody calling themselves ulama."

"They make interpretations not according to Islam but to fit their political agenda. So we have a lot of misinterpretations. I believe the ulama are successors of the Prophet but they are not free from sins and are not perfect. They will make mistakes too even though they may be very learned."

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