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`Second to none in working for Islam'

MALAYSIA is in the forefront of efforts to enhance the standing of Islam and the development of its believers and this is acknowledged by Arab nations including Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as other Islamic nations such as Brunei and Indonesia.

In fact, in a show of appreciation of the numerous efforts initiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Pakistani, Egyptian and Saudi Arabian governments had awarded him the countries' highest awards for his work on the development of Islam.

This, according to Penang delegate, Othman Desa, showed the Islamic nations' gratitude to Malaysia's and its leaders' initiatives towards the development of the religion.

"Despite our numerous achievements, we find two or three opposition leaders alleging that the Barisan Nasional Government, led by Umno, has not done enough for the religion and its believers.

"And when we asked them, especially Pas leaders, to justify their allegations, they cannot simply because they don't even know what they are talking about," he said.

He said Pas leaders, due to lack of understanding of the religion, had created confusion among Muslims.

"They claimed the Government, led by Dr Mahathir, was against many Islamic requirements, including the enforcement of hudud laws.

"They are wrong. Umno accepts hudud laws, but our approach in implementing them are different from Pas'.

"We strongly believe the people should first be made to fully understand what the laws are all about before we introduce them," he said when seconding the motion on religion, social issues and education.

He said since 1998, the committee on Syariah and Civil Laws had introduced various Syariah laws, including Islamic Family Law, in all States.

He added that the Government and Umno had spent billions of ringgit to ensure ample facilities, including mosques and religious schools, were provided.

"Each year, the Government spends RM77 million on compulsory religious studies for schoolchildren and RM65 million on all religious schools."

In a lighter vein, Othman said he was upset when a cabbie in Abu Dhabi mistook him for a Japanese when he flagged down the taxi.

However, when he said he was from Malaysia, the cabbie, with a big smile on his face, responded by asking: "Dr Mahathir?"

This, according to Othman, showed that Dr Mahathir's reputation, especially in the development of Islam, had preceeded him. The remark received thunderous applause from the floor.

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