

Understand true sense of haj: PM

Mahathir stresses need for unity among Muslims throughout the world

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat: The Prime Minister has urged Muslims to understand the significance and seek the true achievement of the haj which brings the message of brotherhood among pilgrims.

Datak Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Muslim *ummah* over the years have become divided into many sects and nations which quite often are at odds with one another.

"They seemingly feel no longer as brothers. They seem to have rejected a cardinal principle of Islam, that they are really one people,

one *ummah*.

"Of course, the avoidance of conflict and fighting is part of the haj as fighting is forbidden during the holy month and in the holy places.

"Even before the coming of Islam this was so. But Islam goes further. Fighting and killing of Muslims by other Muslims is forbidden anywhere, at any time," said Mahathir when delivering his keynote address before declaring open the first International Conference on Haj Guidance at the Palace of the Golden Horses, here, today.

The three-day conference, held for the first time outside the Arab world, is organised by Tabung Haji and sponsored by the Saudi Arabian

government.

The Prime Minister spoke at length on disunity among Muslims and took them to task for "fighting and killing one another which is going against Islam blatantly".

At a media conference later, Mahathir said although it is the general belief of Muslims that they are all brothers, it is not so in practice.

"We find some reason or other not to be brothers even to the point of accusing other Muslims as being apostate and therefore, justifying our quarrel and killing them."

He said many people are performing the haj as rituals without fully understanding the significance of the procedures and the prayers performed.

"It will be necessary for us to standardise this interpretation so that we go there with our mind focused on performing the haj and understanding its significance."

He said the ulama (Muslim scholars) should give proper interpretations to the teachings of Islam so that Muslims can all be guided with the same set of guidance.

"The problem at the moment is that, so many people are interpreting Islam for their own purpose and confusing other Muslims and leading them to fight against each other."

Therefore, he advised Muslims to follow strictly the ample guidance given by the religion and avoid making

interpretations that serve "individual private agenda".

To a question, Mahathir said the conference should also enlighten pilgrims on how they can tolerate each other when they are on pilgrimage.

"We seem not to have enemies the way we have in other places, so if we can focus on this and the real problems faced by pilgrims in-

cluding transportation, official requirements, etc, we would have achieved the objective of this conference."

That point was highlighted also in his speech earlier when he said the Islamic way of life is not limited to the performance of the compulsory rituals and the acquisition of religious knowledge which gains merit for oneself only.

"The Islamic way of life is the way that will ensure that Muslims and Islam are highly regarded and respected, that Muslims and their countries are not oppressed.

"It also entails that Muslim governments are skilled in administration and able to provide the necessities of life, and that they can govern wisely and with justice," said Mahathir.