

PM: Document our history

STAR - 6 JUN 2001

Dr M: We can learn from past mistakes

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged more Malaysians to document the country's history and development for the benefit of future generations.

He lamented that many Malaysians did not even know about the history of the country because there were not many books and documents on it.

"Knowing about history is very important because it helps us learn from past mistakes.

"We have made many mistakes in the past, including in the recent past.

"It is important that all these are documented so that we can learn from them and not repeat the same mistakes," he said when launching the book, *The Propagation*

of Islam in the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago at his office yesterday.

The 472-page book, published by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), is edited by Dr Alijah Gordon.

Dr Mahathir said the book shows that the arrival of Islam to the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago was made possible because Muslims in the early days were adventurous and highly skilled in navigation.

"This clearly proved wrong the idea that Muslims should concentrate purely on learning about religious matters and branding other subjects as secular.

"Local Muslim leaders should bear in mind that if not for the ability of the Muslims hundreds of years ago; to navigate and cross wide bodies of water and skills which require scientific knowledge,

Islam would not have arrived on our shore," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the book should be read by all Malaysians, irrespective of race.

People wanting to retain their culture, way of life and religion, said Dr Mahathir, had always been the cause of many conflicts in the world.

However, he said, that was not so in Malaysia, where the customs of many ethnic groups have contributed much to its cultural mosaic.

"In fact, they, especially the Chinese have contributed much to the Islamisation of the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago.

"Many of the *wali* (saints) documented in Java were Chinese.

"Malaysian Chinese should learn about this so they can be more comfortable with living harmoniously with the Muslims," he said.