

Gain knowledge in all fields, says PM

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Send this message, religious teachers told

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today asked religious teachers to teach their pupils that Islam obliges Muslims to gain knowledge in all fields, in order to strengthen the society and country.

Speaking in a dialogue with 2,000 religious teachers from mosques nationwide, the Prime Minister told them that they must impart the understanding that while Muslims should not ignore religion, they should also not ignore other fields.

"It's important for you to tell them that they must have all kinds of knowledge: science and technology, information technology and others."

He said Islam required Muslims to defend the faith and develop the community, but they would not be able to do so if they did not have the requisite knowledge.

He said if Muslims failed in these obligations to society (*fardhu kifayah*), then they were also committing a sin although they may have fulfilled other religious obligations like saying their prayers.

Dr Mahathir said it was sad to see that parents, who are engineers, sending all their children for religious studies, as they wanted to "make up for their error" in studying engineering.

He said society needed religious teachers and experts, but not everybody had to enter this field.

He added that he was also ashamed to see Muslims committing sins like killing their parents or raping their children, because their religious knowledge was confined to politics of hatred.

He told the teachers that their role was very important because good values and true understanding instilled in children would remain with them for life.

"Islam is special. It's not just about worship but it's a way of life," he said.

The Prime Minister also urged Muslims to be progressive so that people would not look down on them. He said they should realise that it was not their fate to suffer oppression or humiliation, for they had once lived in peace in the golden era of Islam.

He said the problem was caused by people's misinterpretation of religion and their petty quarrels.

He also said the world had one billion Muslims but they were weak, although some Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia was rich. He added that Malaysia was not that weak but still had to develop further.

Speaking to reporters later, he said there were many allegations against religious teachers for deviationist teachings, but the Government could not act without con-

crete proof.

He said people made all kinds of claims but when they were asked to furnish proof, they could not.

He added that he had been meeting many different groups of religious teachers and scholars because of misunderstandings about religion and Government policies.

"Sometimes, we have to repeat ourselves."

He also said the religious teachers had asked for an increase in their allowance and the Government would consider it, "although when I say that, they always think that I have approved it".

Asked about a newsreport on the alleged misappropriation of RM40 million of the development funds for the hardcore poor, he said he was still waiting for the full report.

He did not want to comment on the claim that half the money had been used for the 1999 election campaign in Kelantan.