

PM: Criticism of ulama not insult to Islamic states

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his criticism of political *ulama* was not an insult to Islamic countries such as Iran which were led by the *ulama*.

The Prime Minister said he had not fallen into the trap of the West to divide Islamic scholars, adding that it was a fact that some *ulama* had deviated from the teachings of the religion.

He said Malaysia was recognised as the only country prepared to criticise the world's superpowers for their mistakes. This was possible because the country was free and not indebted to anyone.

Dr Mahathir said the focus of his criticism at the World Economic Forum in New York recently were deviant *ulama* who divided society by interpreting religion to suit their political and personal agendas.

Replying to an oral question from Opposition Leader and Pendang MP Datuk Fadzil Noor at the De-

wan Rakyat today. Dr Mahathir said:

"It is so easy for these political *ulama* to label other Muslims as infidels. not on religious grounds but because of politics.

"But when they are criticised, they get angry and accuse the critics as being anti-*ulama*, anti-Islam and infidels. They are not willing to be criticised when they do wrong. This way, they can continue to deceive their followers and other Muslims."

However, Dr Mahathir said these *ulama* had no qualms about criti-

cising other *ulama* who disagreed with them, even calling them names like *barua*.

"(But) their action (in their eyes) is not seen as anti-*ulama*, anti-Islam and that of infidels. They refuse to accept that they are also anti-*ulama* when they criticise and degrade other *ulama*."

He said the split in the Islamic world today was caused by the deviant *ulama*.

Fadzil took the opportunity to make a speech when allowed by Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail to pose a supplementary question

to the Prime Minister.

This did not go down well with the backbenchers and before long, a shouting match ensued.

Zahir had a tough time bringing order, appealing many times to the MPs to observe the rules.

"Enough . enough this is Parliament. It is better that we complete our business fast as we have other work to do. If people listen to what we have to say, then we should listen when it is their turn to talk."

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The actions of the Opposition MPs prompted Dr Mahathir to quip: "This is (an example of) deviant *ulama*. When they are supposed to ask questions, they make speeches," he said to table-thumping from backbenchers.

He said that except for Pas, other people, including leaders of Islamic countries who were in the audience at the forum, did not object to his criticism of deviant *ulama*.

"In fact, many stood up to express their support but here I do not expect to get any support from those over there," he said, gesturing to Fadzil and the Opposition bench.

Pas MPs, unhappy with the reply, heckled the Prime Minister who responded: "*Takut nak dengar jawapan*" (Are you afraid to hear the replies?)

On Fadzil's contention that there

were also political *ulama* in Umno, Dr Mahathir said his criticism was not directed at them, as the *ulama* in Umno did not deviate or interpret the religion based on political considerations.

Replying to Datuk Ali Hassan (BN-Tebrau), Dr Mahathir said action would be taken against those who broke the law, like failing to recognise *fatwa* issued by the State and national *fatwa* councils.

"But what's certain is that on Judgment Day, they will have to answer for the sins they have committed, including misleading the Muslims."

To a question from Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (BN-Batang Lupar), Dr Mahathir said an *ulama* was not identifiable from the dress he wore, the degrees he held or his membership in *ulama* associations.

"Like *ulama* in the past, they are recognised and known because of their in-depth knowledge and wide

experience of the religion."

Dr Mahathir said many people wished to become *ulama* and the easiest way of achieving this was by "wearing robes and turbans".

"But there are also those who wear a coat and tie. I don't know about this but all claim they are *ulama*, as long as they belong to a certain group.

"This is a big lie, masquerading as someone else (*ulama*) when they actually have not reached that stature."

Replying to Datuk Mustafa Ali (Pas-Dungun), Dr Mahathir said *ulama* in the past did not prohibit Muslims from pursuing non-religious subjects.

That's why besides being recognised as *ulama*, they were also experts in astronomy, science, mathematics and other fields.

"But now we have views that pursuing non-religious subjects is secular," said Dr Mahathir.