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Dr Mahathir on how Malays can truly progress

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Malay Muslim community will progress if it adheres to the fundamentals of Islam, which are simple.

Unfortunately, certain quarters are making it difficult by imposing various conditions before a Muslim could be regarded as true Muslim.

For example, the Prime Minister said many religious obligations had been deemed compulsory by them so much so that they hindered the quest for knowledge and skills as well as obstructed other tasks for the betterment and well-being of Muslims.

"On the contrary, open-mindedness will allow Malay Muslims to accept Islam as a religion which takes into account the constantly changing situation. This way Muslims will never be backward," he said when opening a conference themed Issues and Process of Mind-Opening of the Malay Muslims.

The three-day conference was organised by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

He said the same could be said about jihad, adding that the emphasis was always on war whereas Muslims were actually asked to equip themselves with weapons that could deter their enemies.

"There is no use going to war if Muslims were to lose because of lack of preparation or equipment.

"Those carrying the real jihad are the ones who fund, invent and manufacture weapons which would make Muslims stronger and more sophisticated than the enemies of Islam."

Dr Mahathir said the community was influenced by the teachings of certain quarters, thus could not think and assess what was happening around them.

"Things have changed and it is impossible to re-create the world of 1,400 years ago. If we think that we will only become true Muslims by going back 1,400 years, it means we believe that Islam is suitable for that period only."

Dr Mahathir said those with an open mind, an attribute that should be possessed by all Malay Muslims, would appreciate those studying science and technology.

It is only by mastering this field that modern weapons which could save the Muslims could be invented and manufactured.

He said the Malay Muslims had opened up their minds, but mostly to not so constructive things.

"An open mind must be receptive to what is obvious and the truth. The Malay Muslims are lagging and lacking capabilities in what is obvious and the truth.

"They have to depend on other races to develop and enrich their own country," he said.

In the international stage, he said, it was obvious that the community could not provide assistance to those oppressed and victimised, especially Muslims.

The Prime Minister said open-mindedness should lead the Malay Muslims to identify and acknowledge their shortcomings and the changes that should be made.

"The Malay Muslims should possess the ability to differentiate between the good and bad. They should not be embarrassed to admit their weaknesses or be too proud.

"After identifying these weaknesses, they should adopt and practise good values found in others even though they are not really at ease with that community or race."

Dr Mahathir said one weakness of the Malays was the tendency to opt for an easy way out.

History, he said, had shown how the Malay Rulers had given Chinese merchants monopoly on tax and sale of opium after being promised high returns, and the British the administration of the States after being promised pensions and other wealth.

"In return, the British were given the powers to run the States. True, life improved but they had to give up their States."

Later at a dialogue, Dr Mahathir was asked to elaborate why it was important for Muslims to master all fields of knowledge.

While some would master the religion to become ulama, he said, there would be others who would not be able to do so. Instead, they master other fields which are no less important.

"At present, our problem is that when at war, we are forced to buy weapons from our enemies. Will our enemies sell us the best weapon? Surely not. If we only know how to pray for victory without making any effort, it will also bring no good."

Citing the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as an example, Dr Mahathir said spirit and religious knowledge alone are not sufficient for protection.

"To defend Muslims, we have to master all fields. So do not label those who do not master the religion as un-Islamic because they have also played a role as required by Islam."

To a question on unity, Dr Mahathir said it could be achieved if Muslims were prepared to put aside their differences and concentrate on the more crucial task at hand, which is to protect and defend the religion and its followers.

"We have to pool our strength and resources. Unfortunately, while the religion and Muslims are under threat we are more concerned with trivial matters such as who is more Islamic among us."

On the need to review the education system as many parents preferred their children to study the religion, Dr Mahathir said it could be reviewed but it would bring no benefit if the perception towards education was not changed.

"The same subjects are being taught here and in developed countries but why are we lagging in mastering knowledge? It is because some think that there is no need to study other than religion."

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