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Haram for Muslims to slander one another, says fatwa council chief

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The act of branding Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad a Christian priest is slanderous and haram for Muslims, National Fatwa Council chairman Datuk Dr Ismail Ibrahim said today.

"This is an outright act of slander because Dr Mahathir never wore a priest's robe nor the cross when he was in Vatican City ... I was there with him, together with many others in the entourage," he said when contacted today.

Dr Ismail, who accompanied Dr Mahathir during the visit to the Vatican and the subsequent meeting with Pope John Paul II, said the visit was clearly not against Islam as it was for the sake of world peace.

"It is stated very clearly in the Quran that slander is a big sin, more serious than murder," he said.

He said that during the visit and his meeting with the Pope, Dr Mahathir was very focused in correcting the negative image and misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims by other races and religion.

Masjid Negara Imam Firdaus Ismail, meanwhile, said those who doctored the Prime Minister's photograph and depicted him as a Christian priest had committed a sinful act which was clearly against Islam.

"Firstly, the posters are meant to portray Dr Mahathir (a Muslim) as an infidel and this is slander.

"This is an act which is worse than killing a person.

"Secondly, it is a big lie ... which is considered haram according to the Quran, and the Hadith," he said, adding that a Muslim who knowingly branded another Muslim as an infidel was an infidel himself.

Firdaus, when contacted today, said that the Muslim community should refrain from indulging in such unhealthy practices as this would lead to their downfall.

He warned that the culture of branding others infidels was becoming a normal practice.

"If you look at history, in post-Prophet Muhammad's time, Muslims became weak and divided because such acts were rampant in the community ... this is extremely dangerous for Muslims in Malaysia and Islam itself," he said.

Firdaus said Muslims should have a clear state of mind in matters pertaining to the religion and not be blindly influenced by political agendas.

"Ulama are not maksum (those who are immune from punishment for big sins) and we should not be blindly following them, or anybody else for the matter," he said.

On another matter, Dr Ismail said that it was against the teachings of Islam for a political party to solicit votes as alms for a dead person.

He said Muslims should instead recite the Al-Fatihah and do charity as alms.