

# Dr M: Behaviour of M'sians who studied in Egypt puzzling

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BY K. PARKARAN

**CAIRO:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is perplexed why many Malaysians who study in Egypt return home with extremist tendencies when Egyptians are liberal-minded people.

"Actually, when you come to Egypt, you will be more liberal-minded. For example, there are statues of pharaohs everywhere but the people (Muslims) don't object to it.

"And you can see a mosque next to a church in Cairo. Again there is no problem. In fact, there is nothing in Islam to say you cannot have a church next to a mosque," he told Malaysian journalists during a dinner cruise on the River Nile at the end of his two-day working visit here yesterday.

As such, Dr Mahathir said, people who came here should

learn to be more liberal-minded after living in the country for many years.

"I am disappointed that Malays who study here appear to be more extreme than Egyptians when they return home," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Malays covered themselves completely and followed the most extreme manifestations of Islam.

"They might as well stay at home and learn the religion there (in Malaysia) because they are not learning anything in Egypt," he added.

Asked if this could be because of political interference, he said: "It is possible."

On his meeting with the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar Dr Mohammad Sayed Tantawi, with whom he discussed the problem, Dr Mahathir said he was told that pupils from kindergartens to universities in Egypt were taught that Islam was a moderate religion.

On his meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Dr Mahathir said he extended his personal invitation to him to attend the Non-Aligned Movement Summit next month in Kuala Lumpur.

Perlis Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, who accompanied Dr Mahathir on his working visit here, said that with an estimated 70% of the 6,400 Malaysian students in Egypt being opposition sympathisers, all Barisan Nasional-ruled states had decided to take several measures to break the trend.

Shahidan said the first step would be to stop all financial aid from state *zakat* bodies to students who were not registered with the Malaysian embassy here.

"I have spoken to all the other MBs and they have agreed to a similar action. A joint statement will be made soon," Shahidan added.