Ulamas can heal rift among Muslims: PM

SUN 11 JUL 2005

by R. **Manirajan**
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PUTRAJAYA: Ulamas have to decide by consensus on the interpretations of Islam so that the Muslim community is not split further.

As the ulamas are the most influential people among the Muslim ummah, they must tell the community what to do so that everything possible is done to restore Islam's past glory and great civilisation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday

He said Islam is never wrong and god has not ordained that his religion be insulted or denigrated, nor the ummah oppressed and humiliated.

"The sad fate of Muslims today is of their own doing, their failure to practise the true teachings of Islam."

Therefore, Mahathir said, it is for Muslims to act to resuscitate their religion and bring back the past glory of the Islamic civilisation.

The ulamas, on their part, must guide Muslims through the correct interpretations of the religion.

"But the actual work should be done by Muslims qualified in the various skills. It would be disastrous if the learned in one field assume they are experts in every field," Mahathir said at the opening of the World Ulama Conference themed *Islam in Era of Globalisation.*

He added that Islam does not have a system of hierarchical priests but the Muslim scholars, or the ulama, play an extremely important role in the life of Muslim individuals and the community.

"Such is their influence that the stability and progress of Muslim countries depend much on them."

The ulamas, Mahathir said, are to be the successors of the prophet and this makes them even more powerful and their words are often taken as the religious truth and seldom does anyone dispute any pronouncement made by them.

The great ulamas of history were truly learned people whose only interest was to ensure that Islam was interpreted correctly

"However, even these great ulamas differ in their interpretations of Islam and this has resulted in schisms among Muslims. so deep that many sects cannot be reconciled to this day"

He said the term ulama today is used very loosely and anyone can claim to be one, and they always have followers who can be quite fanatical.

Mahathir also said political Islam has emerged and various manifestations of it has gained followings in most Muslim states.

"With the advent of democracy, political Islam has become more trenchant and this leads to deliberate misinterpretations of Islam to justify and support their political agendas."

Mahathir said Muslims todav are so confused and divided that they are unable to handle the changes that have taken place in the world since the days when Muslims were a world power

"No one dared to oppress or invade their territories. But now, far from being a world power, the one billion over Muslims are oppressed by non-Muslims, easily defeated in war and are forced to accept foreign rule and hegemony"

He said the prophet has been called a terrorist and Muslims today can be arrested, detained or even executed for alleged terrorism.

He said all this happens not because Muslims are weak or the teaching of god is wrong, but because Muslims are not practising the true teaching of Islam.

"In the Quran, it is stated that god will not change the fate of anyone unless they strive to change their fate themselves."