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Parliament-Mahathir

DO NOT USE RELIGION TO DIVIDE PEOPLE OF THE SAME FAITH- DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 30 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, today advised all groups not to use religion to divide the people of the same faith.

He said there was no difference among Muslims in Malaysia hence the question of religion need not be disputed and turned into an issue in relations within the Muslim community.

"In any society even when the people profess the same religion, are of the same race and speak the same language there are bound to be differences as this is human nature and because of these differences there will be differing opinions."

"However concerning religion, there should be no difference as we are all from the Sunni group and followers of the Imam Syafie," he told Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading) during Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat.

Mohd Aziz had asked Dr Mahathir for his parting advice as Prime Minister to the various groups with a view to ensuring lasting national unity.

Dr Mahathir said different opinions apart from that touching on religion could be debated so as to come up with constructive ideas.

"Opinions such as that on policies...on ways of helping Bumiputeras, on ways of dealing with non-Muslims...this we can debate together," he said.

Dr Mahathir also advised the non-Muslim opposition. "To the non-Muslim opposition...remember we are living in the same country. Malaysia is our country and if we discredit our country, we will only become the victims."

He said the majority of non-Muslims in Malaysia were rational and strongly supported the government's moderation in discharging its responsibility.

Dr Mahathir said because of this moderation there had been no racial riots in this country apart from the one on May 13, 1969.

"Fortunately the Barisan Nasional Government gives equal attention to non-Muslims and non-Malays and this has created harmony in our country even though there are some groups which are not happy over this harmony," he said.

He said the majority of the citizens of Malaysia did not support these groups "and will not support them in 2004 either" (general election?) hence the country would continue to remain peaceful.

Replying to Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong), Dr Mahathir said Malaysia faced different challenges compared to other countries as its multiracial population had differing opinions.

"While we accept freedom of speech...we also know that if racial sentiments are allowed to take reign the country's stability will be jeopardised and racial riots will break out," the Prime Minister said.

"When riots break out, the fundamental and democratic rights of the people will be lost," he said.

He said controls to prevent racial riots actually shielded democracy and basic human rights.

"Hence when an individual or a small group incites and this leads to riots, they are actually denying the democratic and human rights of the majority," he said.

Dr Mahathir said action taken against the individual or the minority, which might appear undemocratic, was in fact to protect democracy.

"Likewise we do not allow the communist party to contest in the

election, which is undemocratic, as we know that if they win they will abolish democracy and set up a dictatorship."

"Hence undemocratic action will have to be taken to protect democracy," he added.

Dr Mahathir said an understanding of democracy and a tolerant attitude among the races would preserve national unity and prevent terrorism and terrorist attacks.

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