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Mahathir-Fundamentalism

DR MAHATHIR SAYS HE WILL CONTINUE EXPOUNDING ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

JOGJAKARTA, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he would continue to expound the fundamental teachings of Islam that stressed on moderation and tolerance.

He said that he might not be successful but that he would try, quoting Confucius "a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step."

"I am making the first step. I will try even if you think that you will fail. That is my philosophy," he said in a special interview with a local television station TV7 in conjunction with his visit here to receive the Distinguished Honorary Fellow Award from the ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organisations (AFEO) today.

The one-hour interview carried "live" by the station was conducted by a panel of four senior Indonesian journalists.

He was asked whether he would fight religious fundamentalism and preach religious tolerance even after leaving office end of this month after 22 years at the helm as Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister.

"I want to correct your statement that I am against fundamentalism. I am a fundamentalist, in the sense that I follow the strict teachings of Islam," he replied to the question.

He said the basic teachings of Islam were all very good but over 1,400 years, people had been interpreting and misinterpreting Islam, that today it became almost a different religion -- a religion of violence, backwardness and instability.

That was not because of Islam but because people reinterpreted and interpret it wrongly, he said.

"So what I try to say is to go back to the basic fundamentals of Islam, so that we will appear to be moderate. We are not moderate but people who stick closely to the teachings of Islam," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that at the recent Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting in Kuala Lumpur he had appealed to Muslims to go back to the original teachings of Islam, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad.

"Now we are divided into a thousand different religions, the sunni, the syiah, we have various tarikat (sects), imams and they all teach different things, so much so that we fight against each other.

"That is not Islam. We are brothers. If you admit that you are Muslim, you are brothers, this is what we try to spread," he said.

He believed that if Muslims did that, they would be as successful as the jahiliyah Arab, who in accepting Islam, initiated the establishment of the greatest civilisation in the world - the Muslim civilisation.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the water issue affecting Malaysia and its southern neighbour, Singapore, and why was the row not settled in the ASEAN spirit.

He said it was the question of perspective with Malaysia considering selling water at three sen per 1,000 gallon, fixed in 1957, as unfair.

"We are asking Singapore to revise the price upward but Singapore says that the agreement says unless they agree, we cannot revise, and they don't agree.

"They think that the price of three sen is there though at one time they agreed to increase the price," he said.

The Prime Minister said that Singapore was making tremendous profit and Malaysia was conscious of its obligation to give the Island State enough water for its people to consume and not enough water to make a profit from.

"So until now Singapore refuses to negotiate, so we go for arbitration (at the International Court of Justice)," he explained.

Dr Mahathir also made another clarification about the recent press reports that he was rebuked by United States' President George W. Bush at the just concluded Asia Pacific Economic (APEC) meeting in Bangkok over his statement about the Jews.

The Prime Minister received broad condemnation from the Western leaders, including Bush, for his statement at the OIC meeting in Kuala Lumpur which they regarded as anti-semitic.

Repeating his earlier explanation to the press in Bangkok, he said that Bush pulled him to the side not to rebuke him but, in fact, to explain why he (Bush) used strong words against him in his reaction to Dr Mahathir's statement on the Jews.

"That was all. I told him I understand," he said.

He said the press had asked him whether he thought that was the way the Americans behave, saying something to a person and then saying another thing to somebody else.

"My answer to that is, I don't know. All I know is that he (Bush) did not rebuke me. He came very nearly to apologising to me for the strong words he used," he said.

He said Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar met his colleague, the US Secretary of State, Collin Powell, who explained that he had read his complete speech and understood it.

"He (Powell) understands that I did say something about the Jews but I also said a lot of things about Muslims. So it is a balanced kind of speech," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Powell was not upset about the speech saying "I suspected that he must have informed his chief. But whatever it is, I was not rebuked."

-- BERNAMA

OPP JM SRI