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Mahathir-Islam

MORE PEOPLE RECOGNISE MALAYSIA AS MODEL ISLAMIC STATE- DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 26 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is being increasingly recognised as a model Islamic State particularly by people from other Islamic nations, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said many people whom he met during his visit to Lebanon, Egypt and Switzerland considered Malaysia a model to other Islamic countries.

"It is true... everyone of them, (Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafic) Hariri, members of his Cabinet, as well as President (Emile) Lahoud consider Malaysia a model Islamic State," he told reporters at the military airport in Subang on his return from a weeklong visit to the three countries.

The Prime Minister also addressed students and staff of Cairo's Al-Azhar University.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who welcomed Dr Mahathir at the airport said the invitation to the Prime Minister by Al-Azhar was in recognition of his stature as a leader of an Islamic State.

The Prime Minister who also had talks with the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University is the first foreign head of government to be invited to speak at the venerable institute in 50 years.

Asked why PAS was not acknowledging Malaysia as an Islamic State even though it was considered as such by other countries, Dr Mahathir said if PAS were to do so it would have to close shop so it would not do it.

On reports that PAS used zakat funds to finance the education of eight children of PAS leaders, Dr Mahathir said the use of zakat funds for the purpose would deny even poorer Muslims of such aid.

"It is not a wise thing to do. It does not meet the Islamic conditions for the disbursement of zakat funds."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the Terengganu Government's move to allocate about 50 hectares to Ladang Assemblyman Dr Sulaiman Abdullah.

"Yalah... giving land, increasing salaries... showing off their power for self interest," he said.

On his visit to Lebanon, Dr Mahathir said the country particularly Beirut which faced destruction during 10 years of war, was seeing change and rapid development."

"Beirut which was almost totally destroyed by the war has very remarkable construction and development. There are many high rise buildings and it has restored itself completely," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Lebanon wanted Malaysians to participate in its reconstruction as there was a lot of development to be done.

He said Lebanon, being the only country in West Asia to have snow, and Beirut is a beautiful city, is increasingly becoming a major tourist destination and holiday resort.

"To play ski, the Arabs now won't go to Europe and America because they've got Beirut. It is developing and they want Malaysia to build shopping complexes and do other construction work," he said.

While in Cairo, besides addressing students and staff of Al-Azhar University, Dr Mahathir said he had a long talk with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The Prime Minister said he had invited Mubarak to visit Malaysia.

In Davos, Dr Mahathir who had participated in four sessions of the WEF, said that he had expressed Malaysia's view on terrorism.

"On the whole, I think in Davos this time, we were able to explain and correct the wrong interpretation of terrorism."

"And at the same time we told them that attacking Iraq is not going to help and what they are doing now to combat terrorism has made matters worse," he said.

-- BERNAMA

HS MFJ AAM