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Mahathir-Islam

MUSLIMS HAVE ABANDONED THE PURSUIT OF LEARNING, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Wan A Hulaimi

LONDON, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- Muslims have abandoned the pursuit of learning which once made them great because scholars now interpret reading to acquire knowledge as reading to acquire Islamic religious knowledge only at the expense of other so-called non-religious matters, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Addressing an audience that included academics and Muslim leaders at the Brunei Gallery building of the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) here, he said that Islam needed no re-invention as it was a perfect religion for all times, but the problem was with the interpretation of Islam.

"If we think then we must realise that our present predicament is not preordained by Allah. It is entirely due to our own doing. We have neglected and misinterpreted the teachings of Islam when we should be acquiring knowledge which can help us ward off the attacks against us," he said.

He called for a return to the 'fundamentals' of Islam, those things that could not differ no matter how Islam was interpreted.

"Muslims are brothers. This is fundamental. But we are hardly brothers to each other. We are ready to accuse each other of being apostates and we are ready to kill each other. Islam means peace. We wish peace upon each other. This is also fundamental," he said.

He said that Islam was compatible with democracy as the Prophet Muhammad did not create a dynasty but left his followers to choose a leader from among themselves.

"One can say that a system where the leader is chosen by an electorate, regardless of antecedents, is much more Islamic than otherwise. Having been elected, a leader must care for his people, for the ummah. And caring means ensuring his people will have food, clothing and shelter and be secure from domestic or foreign aggression."

While expressing his approval for democracy as a Muslim, Dr Mahathir also decried modernists who wanted to emulate the Europeans and even went so far as to believe that Muslims could only regain their pre-eminence by discarding Islam altogether and becoming secular.

He said that these reformers were too influenced by the separation of Church and State in European thinking.

"It may be possible in the Christian context. It is not possible in the Muslim world. Islam is a way of life and a way of life cannot be compartmentalised into spiritual and material. Everything that a person does is a way of life. Certainly the system of government of a country and its development is a part of the way of life," he argued.

He urged Muslims to stop emphasising and venerating the form rather than the content, and return to the fundamentals of Islam, the acquisition of knowledge, brotherhood of Muslims, to the way of life and the substance of Quranic teachings and the verified traditions (hadiths) of the Prophet.

"Even in modernisation they look for the form," he said.

To keep to this form, clothing was translated as Arab dress and the rejection of the universally worn coat and trousers as "un-Islamic", acquiring Islamic knowledge was seen as the only worthwhile pursuit, and the veneration of ancient weapons of war became sufficient recourse for the defence of the Ummah.

He asked the question if Muslims must forever buy their weapons from

others, even including possible enemies.

To this he gave an answer: "Surely they must have indigenous capacities to invent and produce their defence needs themselves. To do this they must learn science, mathematics, technology and the rest...it should be regarded as `ibadah' which should gain merit for the individual and merit for the community."

Extending this argument further, he said that there were two types of obligations (fardhu) for Muslims, the Fardhu Ain which was incumbent on an individual, and the Fardhu Kifayah, which was incumbent on a community.

Emphasising the latter, he said: "The Muslim belongs not just to himself. He belongs to the Muslim community, the ummah. The well-being of the ummah is the responsibility of all members of the Muslim community. If that well-being is not taken care of by the individuals or collectively by the community, then every Muslim in the community would have sinned. That is what is meant by `fardhu kifayah'."

Continuing his theme of form over content, Dr Mahathir showed that this could bring disastrous results, as in a woman who failed to produce witnesses to back her allegation of rape.

"If she cannot produce four witnesses then she is guilty of false accusation and should be whipped. If later she bears a child, then that is evidence of zinah (adultery) and should be punished by stoning to death. Obviously this...ignores the [Quranic] injunction to judge with justice. But the orthodox remain adamant that the procedures must be adhered to even if they result in injustice," he said.

He called for a balance between the need for scholars and teachers and the need for food, clothing and shelter, health and security providers.

At the beginning of his speech, which was entitled "Islam and the Ummah, re-examining and re-inventing ourselves in the face of new challenges", Dr Mahathir said he hoped he would not touch on raw nerves as the subject he had chosen to speak on was `very sensitive and controversial'.

His conclusion was that while Islam needed no re-invention, the Muslims' attitude towards their religion needed to be re-examined to bring the religion back to its original greatness.

"Is it impossible to do this?" he asked.

"If we think rationally, we must admit that it is possible. What have we got after almost 100 years of fighting? Nothing. Even our anger is not assuaged. We are, in fact, getting more angry."

In an obvious reference to terrorism and `suicide bombers', Dr Mahathir asked, "Should we just lash out indiscriminately, killing innocent people, including those who sympathise with us? Shouldn't we stop to think, to plan and to strategise with ultimate victory as our goal?"

He said there was no justification for Muslims being labelled as terrorists, but this was not pre-ordained by Allah but was entirely their own doing, so Muslims must return to the original teachings of the Prophet and be a thinking and not an emotional man.

"And Allah has endowed us with riches beyond imagination. We have certain strengths which we must identify and apply with wisdom," he said.

-- BERNAMA

WAH KHY SRI ABG