

10 JUL 2003

Mahathir-Ulamas

ULAMAS' GUIDANCE KEY TO RESTORE GLORY OF ISLAM, SAYS DR M

PUTRAJAYA, July 10 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today stressed that bringing back the past glory of the Islamic civilisation hinges very much on ulamas guiding the ummah through correct interpretation of Islam.

The Prime Minister said that being the most influential people among the Muslim ummah, ulamas were capable of changing the Muslim mind in any direction.

"If you decide that you want to remove the shame of being looked down upon and trodden under by those who are against us, then you must tell us that you want us to do everything possible to restore our past glory and our great civilisation," he said.

The ulamas, he said, would have to make this decision which should be reached on consensus so that different interpretations would not split the ummah further.

"That is your collective duty to Islam and the ummah," he said in his usual blunt delivery when opening the World Conference of Islamic Scholars here.

Speaking before some 900 Muslim scholars and thinkers from 33 countries, Dr Mahathir said the sad fate of the Muslims today was the result of the ummah's own doing, including failure to practise the true teachings of Islam.

Underscoring the important role of ulamas in the revival of the Muslim community, he said they could motivate the ummah towards achieving progress and strength.

"Achieving all the things that our detractors have achieved is not difficult. But we need to be pointed in the right direction. The ulamas can help us to do this," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims could regain their past glory if they were orientated towards having all the skills and knowledge to make the Islamic way of life or "Addin" admired, respected and held in awe by others.

He said Muslims would never be able to bring back the honour and the respect for Islam and themselves unless they became capable again of defending the community.

"It is for the Muslims to act to resuscitate their religion and bring back the past glory of the Islamic civilisation," he said.

The Prime Minister said ulamas must guide them in this endeavour but the actual work must be done by Muslims qualified in various skills as it would be "disastrous if the learned in one field assume they are experts in every field."

Noting that the salvation for Muslims would not be achieved by blindly killing innocent people, Dr Mahathir said it would depend much on their ability to plan and execute a long-term development plan and to excel in all fields.

Conceding that their rehabilitation process would take a long time, he said Muslims must be patient but, God willing, they would succeed in the end.

"We must prove to the world that Islam is not an obstacle to progress, that Islam is a religion for all times, that Islam is a religion of peace and stability, that Islam can co-exist in a world where Muslims make up only one-sixth of humankind," he added.

Dr Mahathir also cautioned Muslims not to accept as genuine everyone

who claimed to be an ulama as many self-declared ulamas were pretenders with their own self-interest agenda.

"These pretenders have confused the Muslims so much that frequently their practices can hardly be regarded as Islamic," he said.

He spoke at length on the disunity among the Muslims as a result of the different teachings and interpretations of Islam.

"Differences in Islam is healthy and permitted but surely not to the extent of condemning others as infidels, kafir and to war against each other, forming alliances with non-believers to fight fellow Muslims," he said.

Dr Mahathir also delved on political Islam which used the religion for political ends, resulting in the deliberate misinterpretation of Islam to justify and support political agendas.

"Thus political Islamists go so far as to declare that anyone who does not support their political parties as infidels, kafir and will go to hell in the afterlife," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this frightened a lot of ignorant people into supporting them and such was the fanatical commitment of the supporters that even obvious misinterpretations by their leaders were accepted by them.

He said the supporters even readily believed when the leaders of political Islam declared that Allah used filthy and obscene words and was a gangster.

"Yet others interpret Al-Mutaqabir differently, as Allah the Great, the possessor of greatness. The language of the bazaar cannot be applied to Allahu Akbar," he said.

Touching on terrorism, Dr Mahathir said although Muslims suffered much more from terror, only Muslims and Islam were linked to terrorism while the religions of non-Muslims who committed acts of terror were not mentioned.

He said Muslims must ask themselves why they had to endure this humiliation and why they had become so weak and incapable of standing up for their rights.

"Far from being a world power, we, the one billion over Muslims, are easily oppressed by non-Muslims, easily defeated in war and are forced to accept foreign rule and foreign hegemony," he said.

The three-day event ends on Saturday.

-- BERNAMA

JM MAM AO