

# . Mahathir conferred honorary doctorate in Islamic Thought

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**PETALING JAYA:** Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was conferred the Doctor of Islamic Thought honorary degree by Universiti Malaya in a special convocation ceremony yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, who received the award from UM Chancellor Sultan Azlan Shah, said Muslims should be aware that Muslim nations were in "a critical state".

"Muslim nations are weak and not one of them can be considered a developed country or even a world power. The Muslim community is backward and has many social problems," he said in his speech.

"Muslims are divided into various groups with different religious understandings. The differences lead each group into believing that only their beliefs are right and as a result, they become enemies," he said.

He said the glorious past of Islamic civilisation was proof that Islam could bring about development.

"The problem is that Muslims learn Islamic teachings in the Al-Quran and Hadith through interpretations made by scholars and teachings from religious teachers.

"Even those who understand Arabic need these interpretations and religious teachings."

He said some teachings contained metaphors and teachings from prophets before Muhammad, and the interpretation depended on the scholars' understanding and background.

As these factors were different, the interpretations could differ as well, he noted.

"We cannot reject the roles played by scholars and religious teachers as without them, our understanding would be based on individual thinking.

"The reality is that although these scholars have an in-depth knowledge of religion, they are also human beings.

"Not all *ulama* or those that consider themselves as one have so much knowledge that they do not make mistakes," he said.

He added that one should not be seen as rejecting the religion when he did not accept some of the interpretations.

Speaking to reporters later, UM vice-chancellor Datuk Prof Dr Hashim Yaacob said:

"We wanted to honour Dr Mahathir for his Islamic philosophy which has helped him to develop this country."

Also present at the special convocation were pro-chancellors Raja Dr Nazrin Shah and Toh Puan Dr Aishah Ong.