

31/01/2004

Muslims must use intellect to test certain Islamic teachings, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Muslims must use their intellect to test certain Islamic teachings for truth and accuracy, and not blindly follow what some ulamas say, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Not to use our intellect to reject erroneous interpretations of Islam is to reject God's gift to us," the former Prime Minister said.

"Questioning certain interpretations is not a rejection of Islam.

"We need to carefully study differing interpretations that confuse and divide us."

Dr Mahathir, who was today conferred an honorary Doctorate of Islamic Thought from the University of Malaya by the Sultan of Perak Sultan Azlan Shah, who is the UM Chancellor, said this in his acceptance speech.

He said the fundamentals of Islam were not debatable, but different teachings on the Quran and hadith arose because the scholars who interpreted them, as humans, were prone to sin while some even held political agendas.

"We do not deny the important role of the ulamas and interpreters. But the reality is that no matter how knowledgeable they are, they are not free from faults and sins.

"It is definitely possible that interpretations by some of them are not accurate, and even wrong," Dr Mahathir said.

He said it was "not too farfetched" to say that the ill lot of the ummah and Muslim countries - their poverty, violence and factionalism - was because they did not know the true teachings of Islam, but only believed the selective interpretations of certain scholars.

He said some scholars were adamant about upholding Islamic processes that they rejected knowledge of other fields, for example, the use of DNA as evidence in a rape or murder.

"If a murderer or rapist is convicted by DNA, will we free him because there was no witness to the crime? Circumstantial evidence can be accepted in Islamic justice, but there are interpreters who reject this because they want to uphold the process," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said current religious education was too focused on individual piety (fardhu ain) and failed to expand on fadrhu kifayah, which taught about living in peace with one another and serving the community.

He said the ability of Islam to transform society was evident from the glory days of the religion after the Quran was revealed.

Since his retirement last October, Dr Mahathir has received two other honorary degrees, a Doctorate of Letters from the International Islamic University of Malaysia and in the field of management and engineering from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.