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PM's speech thought-provoking, analytical and true, say participants

reports on "World Conference of Islamic Scholars 2003" by Firdaus ANALYTICAL, thought-provoking and so very true - that was how some participants described Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's opening speech yesterday.

They said one prominent element pointed out by Dr Mahathir was the misinterpretation of Islam which led to some Muslims turning into fanatics and extremists, deviating far from the real teachings of the Quran.

One of the speakers, Dr Abdul Rahim Ali Mohammad Ibrahim from Sudan, said the Prime Minister's speech was not only analytical, but also psychological.

"He had invited Muslim scholars to play an important role in uniting the ummah by giving the correct interpretation of Islam and the comprehensive understanding of addin (Islam as a way of life)".

Rahim said the misinterpretation was a serious problem and existed in all parts of the world.

"These differences had in the past led to the humiliation of Muslims worldwide," he said.

He said Islam as a religion should not be used for anyone's political agenda.

"This is another big problem facing the ummah then and now. The followers have to go back to the real roots of this religion and decide whether they want to be a real Muslim or not," said Rahim.

Director of Institute of the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World in Los Angeles Dr Fathi Osman said Dr Mahathir's speech was constructive and thought-provoking.

"Dr Mahathir reminded us to care about presenting Islam as a way of life and civilisation," he said, adding that it could not be denied that Muslims, due to misinterpretations of Islam, have developed "inferiority complex".

The inferiority complex had led to non-Muslims to regard Muslims as "so soft and so weak. And to make up for our inferiority, we become extremists".

Fathi said Dr Mahathir had asked for a change in this weak attitude so that Muslims could progress well in this contemporary world.

Resorting to aggression, extremism or fanaticism is futile, he said.

"What we need to do is to work hard for a long time until we can prove that we deserve to live in the contemporary world successfully.

"It is difficult to predict where we go from here. We have an accumulated heritage of weaknesses, misunderstanding, ignorance and now we want to wake up to change all this. This will not happen in a short time, it will take time. The most important thing is to be on the right track and start".

International Islamic University fellow Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady said Dr Mahathir's speech had directly touched the real problems facing the ummah now.

"I hope by the end of this conference, there will be a consensus or some understanding that we need to be united to survive," he said, adding that Muslims must equip themselves with sufficient knowledge in various areas especially in the information and communication technology.

Australian Nada Ibrahim, a post-graduate student of UIA, said when Muslims became more technology-savvy, "they should try to surpass the West and maybe even go beyond that".

She said Dr Mahathir had touched on a lot of pertinent issues.

"We must look at each of them and see how best we can apply this to our lives. And I hope the conference will discuss thoroughly on what Dr Mahathir had said".

Professor Souhil Zakkar of Damascus University, Syria, said the Prime Minister's speech was timely and very accurate.

Malaysia and Dr Mahathir, he said, were good models of an Islamic country and leader respectively.

"We admire your country and leader very much and we hope this conference would be good for all the Muslims".