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Dr M: Ease fears of non-Muslims

Deborah Loh

SERI KEMBANGAN, Fri. - Muslim missionary activities should be extended to non-Muslims to give them a better understanding of true Islam, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

"We don't require the non-Muslims to embrace the religion, but we want to ease their fears because there is a lot of misunderstanding that Islam promotes violence and terror," he said.

"We don't want to be enemies of non-Muslims. There is no harm in having good relations with them."

Speaking at a fund-raising dinner for the Islamic Welfare Organisation (Perkim), Dr Mahathir said most dakwah efforts targeted the Muslim community itself.

He said this did not fulfil the true purpose of dakwah, which was to spread the religion.

He added that the failure of Muslims to reach out to non-Muslims had caused misunderstanding about Islam - a religion of peace.

"The problem is that there are so many versions of what true Islam is. For example, the split between the Sunni and the Shia.

"Because there are so many versions of Islam, the Muslims tend to disagree with one another and become disunited and weak," he said.

In order to engage non-Muslims effectively, Dr Mahathir said Muslims should also increase their knowledge in other fields such as science and mathematics.

"Because Muslims are weak in knowledge they cannot progress."

He said without knowledge, prayers would not be answered because Muslims had failed to put in their own effort.

"The recent invasion of Iraq has caused Muslims to question the ill fate which has befallen them. After all, we had prayed for protection and that the war would not start. But as we all know, Iraq was invaded and there are Muslims who are disappointed.

"It is not that God has abandoned or disappointed us, but it is us who have disappointed Islam because we do not seek knowledge and we do not make the effort."

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, later received donations from various organisations and corporate sector for the Perkim fund. The dinner tonight raised RM1.5 million.

Among those present was Perkim president Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who is Sarawak Chief Minister.