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King: Follow the true path (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The rakyat must know the true meaning of an Islamic state, jihad and the role of the mosque, as a confused society would undermine the country's stability, Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin said today.

He said there had been recent indications that the unity of the ummah could be jeopardised if such confusion persisted.

Opening the fifth session of the 10th Parliament today, the King said the rakyat should know the truth in order for the country to continue enjoying peace and prosperity.

"This (disunity) is the result when Muslims do not uphold the revered and true view on several matters, such as the understanding of Malaysia as an Islamic state, the meaning of jihad and the misuse of the mosque institution."

The King said he viewed with concern the activities of some Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR), which did not teach the true teachings of Islam but instead instigated students to hate other Muslims.

"If the Government were to continue supporting such deviant religious schools, it means it is condoning teachings that are contrary to Islam."

However, he was grateful to note that many parents and SAR students had responded to the Government's call for transfer to national schools, which could provide a balanced education on fardhu ain (individual obligations) and fardhu kifayah (social obligations) as required in Islam.

In a speech touching on a wide range of issues, including the economy, education, social and international affairs, the King also congratulated Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Government on the successful hosting of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit recently.

He expressed confidence that as chairman for the next three years, Malaysia would be able to provide effective leadership in confronting the challenges of global justice, prosperity and fairness as well as contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

"I am also confident Malaysia's leadership will help revitalise the movement to ensure it remains relevant and meets the aspirations of its members."

Touching on the need to master English in the face of globalisation, the King stressed the importance of students having a good grasp of the language, which would enable them to follow developments in science and technology.

However, he regretted that the Government's initiative on the use of English in the teaching of Science and Mathematics had been made an issue by certain quarters.

"It reflects their narrow-mindedness, without realising the importance of building a harmonious Malaysian society," said the King.

On the economy, he noted that Malaysia had performed well despite uncertainties in the world economy. "This success is the result of the Government's wisdom in formulating sound policies and strategies, and its ability to react fast to changes."

To remain competitive, he said, new fields needed to be identified, especially in the services, agriculture and manufacturing sectors.

"The private sector must be prepared to take the risk without depending on government aid and assistance only."

Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin said although the agriculture sector continued to

be developed, the country's expenditure on food imports was still high. "Efforts to produce more food and reduce imports will be intensified. Emphasis will be given to upgrading the agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries sectors through the use of new approaches."

The various festivals celebrated by Malaysians and the practice of open house were also noted by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who said the events demonstrated national unity.

"The open house is also aimed at informing the world that Malaysia is a safe and exciting tourist destination, with various festivities celebrated throughout the year."

The King expressed satisfaction that despite events in the United States and Bali and travel advisories issued by certain countries discouraging their citizens from coming to this region, tourist arrivals last year had increased by four per cent over 2001.

"I am satisfied with the increase in tourism revenue to RM25.2 billion in 2002 from RM24.2 billion in 2001.

"I am confident that with the concerted efforts of the Government and the private sector, more tourists will come to Malaysia."

International issues, the King said, should be resolved through peaceful and fair means and not through war.

He said the tendency of certain parties to resort to unilateral action in solving conflicts was worrisome, adding that international norms and the role of the United Nations should not be discarded.

Major powers, he said, should understand the causes of terrorism before turning to military action in combating the scourge.

The King said all Governments should realise that they needed each other in solving international issues.

"It cannot be denied that terrorism is a threat to the world. That's why it is imperative for the international community to act firmly against those involved in terrorist activities or their collaborators.

"However, if our actions are not tempered with wisdom and a comprehensive and collective approach, our intentions might not be realised."

He regretted that the world was facing various problems, including the threat of terrorism often associated with Islam.

"The Sept 11 incident has tarnished the image of Islam, Muslims and Islamic countries. Because of it, terrorism is now always associated with Islam due to terror activities committed by certain Muslims.

"On the other hand, far greater violence committed by non-Islamic groups or individuals are not associated with their religions."

The King also said that Malaysia's rapid infrastructure development had boosted the confidence of foreign countries in Malaysian contractors.

"Technical expertise, efficiency and the high reputation of local contractors have opened the way for local contractors to be awarded major infrastructure projects like highways, bridges, ports and water supplies.

"But in this globalised era, local contractors should merge through smart partnerships to compete internationally."

Earlier at Parliament Square, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 107 officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment, under the command of Mejar Ariffin Saimon.

The King and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah were received by Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, and the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara speakers.

Cabinet members, deputy ministers, parliamentary secretaries, MPs, Senators and members of the diplomatic corps were later introduced to Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin and Tuanku Fauziah.