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PM: Don't reinvent Islam (HL)

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TAKING his views on Islam and Muslims to scholars and other interested parties at an international stage yesterday, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged followers of the religion to look inwardly and address their problems by going back to the basic teachings of the faith.

In a speech that Muslims may find controversial, and informative by non-Muslims to say the least, the Prime Minister said there was no need to reinvent Islam, but added that Muslims must re-examine the Islam they practise.

"The Prophet brought to us only one religion of Islam. Today, there are hundreds of Islams. We have to go back to the one Islam brought by the Prophet. We must do so as thinking Man, not as emotional Man.

"We can face the challenges of our times not by giving vent to our anger, our frustrations and our bitterness. We must instead use the brain, that thinking capacity that Allah has endowed us with. We must take stock of our assets, we plan and we strategise.

"And Allah has endowed us with riches beyond imagination. We have certain strengths, which we must identify and apply with wisdom. Above all, we must reduce the enmity between us, if not completely, at least selectively to face the threat against us.

"There is no magic in the successes of our detractors. We can do what they can do. But we have to rid ourselves of the baggage of history and focus completely on the problems we face today. InshaAllah, we will overcome the challenges without losing our faith or deviating from the fundamental teachings of Islam," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said this in his speech "Islam and the ummah: Re-examining and reinventing ourselves in the face of new challenges" at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

This is not the first time Dr Mahathir had brought his views on Islam to the international stage, especially in the United Kingdom. In 1996, Dr Mahathir spoke on "Islam: The misunderstood religion" at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Oxford University.

Dr Mahathir raised numerous questions for Muslims to ponder. He asked: "Can we honestly say that the situation of the Muslim in this world today is good? It certainly is not. And if it is not, is it because of Islam, because of its teachings? Or is it because changes have been made to.

Islam so that it is no longer in accordance with the original teachings of Islam?"

The Prime Minister argued that changes occur to everything over time, and that all religions change over time, besides ideas and values. Changes happen in the Christian religion, to the ideals of egalitarian ideologies and to democracy as well.

"The sins of yesteryear are now no longer sins so much so that even the priests can indulge in them openly. In democracy, it has become an excuse for applying sanctions, denying food and medicines, and finally to war against innocent people, killing and maiming them, invading and occupying their countries.

"The wishes of the majority are negated by the veto of one, even as it talks about promoting democratic processes," Dr Mahathir said. Immediately after his talk, the Prime Minister flew to Stockholm for a three-day visit to Sweden.

He told his audience that democracy was compatible to Islam, citing the

Prophet as an example because he did not create a dynasty. He left it to his followers to choose from among themselves a leader, a Khalifah. It was only later that the Muslim dynasties were set up, he said.

Dr Mahathir dealt at length on the internal problems of the Muslims. He pointed out that if the fundamentals of Islam were adhered to, there should not be conflicts and wars between Muslims. The fundamentals cannot differ.

"Muslims are brothers. This is fundamental to Islam. But we are hardly brothers to each other. We are ready to accuse each other of being apostates and we are ready to kill each other.

"Islam means peace. We wish peace upon each other. This is also fundamental to Islam. We only fight against those who attack us, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. When the enemy sues for peace, Muslims must respond positively. But we are doing none of these fundamental things."

He lamented that today, Muslims were labelled as terrorists. He said Muslims regarded that as unjustified, and might be right in feeling that way. "But the fact is that we are killing people because of our anger regardless of who we kill, regardless of the consequences.

"Admittedly we are desperate and outgunned and there is very little else we can do to defend ourselves against the injustice perpetrated against us. But should we just lash out indiscriminately, killing innocent people, including those who sympathise with us? Shouldn't we stop to think, to plan and to strategise with ultimate victory as our goal?

"Is it impossible to do this? If we think rationally, we must admit that it is possible. What have we got after almost 100 years of fighting? Nothing. Even our anger is not assuaged. We are in fact getting more angry."

The Prime Minister concluded that there was no need to reinvent Islam and the religion was perfect and was for all times. The present age did not make Islam irrelevant, he said.