

10/09/2003

'Provide Muslims with proper reasoning'

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JOHOR BARU, Tues. - Islamic scholars who studied the Quran and Hadis should provide Muslims with the proper reasoning for their interpretation if the religion is to remain relevant with the progress of time.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who made this call tonight, said this was necessary if the application of science and technology in the everyday life of Muslims is to be justified in Islam.

He said this aspect of religious reasoning was vital because many things that existed today were non-existent at the time of Prophet Muhammad about 1,400 years ago.

If a problem arises from the conflict of interpretation regarding such matters, consultations should be considered with those who are experts in the relevant fields, he said when opening the 46th National Quran Reading Competition at the Johor Baru Indoor Stadium tonight.

The opening ceremony of the five-day event was attended by over 10,000 people.

Present were Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin and State Executive Council members.

Dr Mahathir said the misinterpretation of the Quran had caused a lot of injustices in Islamic society and had given the religion a bad image.

He said fatwa (religious edicts) made without proper research and coordination of the ulama, and not based on the true teachings of the Quran and consultation of experts in the relevant fields, would confuse the Muslims.

He said a properly constructed fatwa was important for the Muslims because there are technologies which were not mentioned by the Quran but had been proven to be crucial in saving lives such as blood transfusion and organ transplant.

"It should be borne in mind that at one time the use of electricity, motor vehicles and photographs of human and animals were barred in fatwa by ulama," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims' understanding of the Quran relied mostly on interpretation of those who were supposedly religious experts, but he reminded them that these people were only humans and could also make mistakes

"The differences in interpretations of the Quran had split Muslims into different mazhab, tarikat and groups, who are accusing each other of deviations and regard each other with enmity.

"It is sad that while Muslims are being oppressed by their enemies, there are those among them who are willing to kill each other over misunderstandings on the interpretations of the Quran," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Quran provides Muslims with guidance but in many instances many of its contents were not given the proper balance of attention.

"There are verses which are given priority while there are those whose importance seems to be ignored."

He said it has become almost a norm for certain ulama to give due weight to certain religious duties such as prayers and fasting and the position of women in society.

"In this respect, the parts in Quran which stress the importance of justice were not given much importance unlike the judicial process itself

which was given a lot of attention.

"It appears that the concept of judicial process as a tool to achieve justice is also not important to them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the understanding that only religious knowledge is merited in Islam while other fields of knowledge is of lesser importance had caused the Muslims to remain backward, weak, easily deceived and controlled by their enemies.

Dr Mahathir said although interpreting the Quran is the job of ulama, there are verses which are very clearly put that they can be used as a direct guidance by ordinary Muslims.