

Caliph Umar lauded at integrity conference
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Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim today lauded the model of governance espoused by Caliph Umar Abdul Aziz at an integrity conference in Penang.

Anwar was the keynote speaker at the conference, which is devoted to contemplation of the model of governance practiced by Caliph Umar, who in the PKR supremo's telling, a "paragon of virtue" as a ruler.

Caliph Umar governed the vast domains of Islam from his seat in Medina in the 8th century, a period when the religion was in full flower and, under administrators like Umar, a model of justice and equity, to non-Muslims even.

Though Anwar volubly held forth on the virtuous aspects of this model of governance, he acknowledged that there was a gap in many Muslim lands the rulers' profession of their faith and execution of its imperatives.

But this was no reason, said Anwar, for critics to take the reality of corrupt leadership by Muslims in countries under their rule as a ubiquitous given.

He said the model of governance practiced and espoused by Caliph Umar in which justice for all, including non-Muslims, was the ideal and was upheld as exemplary of the faith.

Anwar said that Umar Caliph did not insist on the payment of the tax (jizyah), obligatory of non-Muslims residing under Muslim rule.

He said Caliph Umar's discounting this tax must have been due to his perception that its imposition, in some instances, would detract from the overriding imperative of justice.

Anwar said justice was the overriding imperative in any model of Muslim governance.

Fresh interpretations needed

He also alluded to the 29th century Muslim thinker Mohamed Iqbal's call in his magnum opus, 'The Reconstruction of Muslim Thought', for fresh interpretations of the higher ideals of the syariah.

Anwar said traditional interpretations that remained mired in a bygone age gave Islam the look of an obsolete faith rather than one that was dynamic and alert to the need to reflect the religion's ideals in modern times.

He said as a ruler Caliph Umar was always consciousness of what the people were saying and accordingly subjected his methods to the tests modern democrats set great store by - the maxims of justice and equity.

Anwar also took the opportunity to pan MCA president Chua Soi Lek's scatter-shot criticisms of governance in Muslim-majority nations.

Departing from his prepared text, the PKR leader described Chua's views as "extremely prejudiced" and attributed them to gross "ignorance."

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