

Round Two: Dr M vs the Muslim clergy
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad is doing it again, locking horns with the Muslim clergy. And this time, the issue of brushing your teeth during the fasting month has ruffled his feathers.

More than a decade ago, Mahathir was embroiled in an infamous spat with former Selangor mufti, the late Ishak Baharum.

Their argument was over a series of raids mounted by the Selangor Islamic council (better known as Jais) on Muslim contestants of a beauty pageant and beer-drinking Muslims at a popular restaurant.

Now, Mahathir has trained his guns on ex-Perlis mufti Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin over a blog posting that the latter put up.

On Sep 6, Asri published an article in his blog titled, '*Islam: Antara Nas Dan Pendapat Tokoh*'. (Islam: Between verse and cleric's opinion).

Focusing on this, Mahathir, in his blog, discussed one of the points that the ex-Mufti touched on in his article titled '*Hukum Allah*' (God's edicts).

The point in question is about the popular belief that it is not encouraged for Muslims to brush their teeth during the fasting month of Ramadan.

"Is it true that the opinion is an edict of Allah?" asked Mahathir.

He then went on to explain that there is no actual basis for the above belief for it is not backed by any verse of the Quran or even within credible 'hadiths' (teachings of Prophet Muhammad).

Punishments must fit the crime

Mahathir also explored the possibility that many of the rulings which we take as 'edicts of God', are actually fallible and often flawed interpretations by man.

He argued that this is why "Islamic belief and practices differ from country to country." Mahathir could have had the controversy surrounding part-time model Kartika Sari Dewi Shukarnor in mind, when he said: "Allah likes those who are considerate and show clemency in administering punishments."

Kartika, who was caught drinking beer at a pub in Pahang, was sentenced to RM5,000 fine and six strokes of the rotan by the syariah high court.

Meanwhile, Mahathir also wrote that in implementing Islamic law, the Quran said that punishments must fit the crime.

He also mentioned that those who forgo the right to punish will be rewarded with the absolution of his own sins.

Questioning the clergy, Mahathir asked: "Are the upright clergy really upholding Allah's edicts when they issue opinions and fatwas?"
Mahathir ended his posting, calling on all to "preserve the name of Islam and not do anything to tarnish it."

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