

Dr M defends embattled Asri
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Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged the Islamic authorities not to penalise former Perlis Mufti Dr Asri Zainul Abidin just because the latter had different opinions about Islam.

In an entry on his blog today, Mahathir said the authorities should not be too hasty in arresting Asri because having different opinions should not be construed as deviating from mainstream sunni Islam teachings.

He said it was certain that in other countries where sunni teachings are propagated, a study would show that the *ulama* (religious scholars) would have different opinions.

"Even in the nine states and one (federal) territory of Malaysia, there are many differences in terms of laws and teachings of Islam. There is difference of opinion even on determining the day for *hari raya* (aidilfitri)," wrote Mahathir.

Mahathir was commenting on the widely publicised and highly criticized arrest of Asri, ostensibly for preaching at a private home without authorisation from the Selangor Islamic Department (Jais).

What about Islam Hadhari?

About 50 police officers and Jais officials were involved in the arrest but strangely, no charges were laid on Asri when he was produced before the syariah court the following day

Mahathir noted that large presence of enforcement officers made Asri look like a "big criminal" who would use violence if apprehended but the former-Mufti did not resist.

"Then, the papers said there was no case against him. Don't we have due process in the enforcement of Islamic laws?

"Can they enforce Islamic laws with indiscriminate arrests?" asked Mahathir.

Mahathir also took the opportunity to again raise his pet peeve - Islam Hadhari - and asked rhetorically if it was part of mainstream sunni Islam belief.

"If yes, then Muslims must adhere to Islam Hadhari. If not, what action will the religious authorities take against the teachings of Islam Hadhari," he asked.

Islam Hadhari or 'civilisation Islam' was introduced in 2004 by Mahathir's handpicked successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on the eve of the 11th general election.