

'Islam vulnerable to threats as Muslims too divided'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Islam is vulnerable to threats because the Muslim community and Islamic nations are divided, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said the divisions were so severe that it had become impossible for Muslims and Islamic nations to unite to launch counter attacks.

He illustrated his points by comparing the present to the time of Prophet Muhammad.

"During the time of Prophet Muhammad, there were no Sunnis or Shias. Islamic scholars can tell me this. There was only one Islam.

"The Quran forbids us from teaching Islam in a way that breaks us into different sects.

"Today, there are many Islamic sects. We are so divided that there are quarters who make use of our antagonism towards each other to achieve their objective of controlling the Muslims.

"These people (leaders from different sects) teach their versions of Islam."

He was speaking at the colloquium on "Demystifying Islamophobia: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Islam" here yesterday.

During the question-and-answer session, Dr Mahathir called on the Muslim community to learn more about their religion and reject deviant teachings to remain united.

"What you see in certain countries is the constant fighting for centuries between Shias and Sunnis because each consider the other not Islamic enough and see the other as infidels.

"However, these people are the ones who professed the declaration of faith '*La ilaha ila Allah, Muhammadur-rasul Allah*'. (There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.)

"Nowadays, we make up new criteria for being Muslim.

"If you go back to the true criteria of being a Muslim, which is that you believe in one Allah

and that Prophet Muhammad is His prophet, then there will be no divisions among us."

Dr Mahathir said in the past, Muslims were able to build great civilisations that were far ahead of others.

"We need to study and find out where the civilisations

went wrong so that we have good governance in our country. Good governance can contribute to the strength of a nation."

He said many Islamic nations faced problems related to "brain drain", which would halt development and progress.

"There are capable Muslims who are not given a chance to show their abilities, so many migrate to other countries. This results in their countries being plagued by brain drain stemming from capable Muslims migrating

from Muslim nations to non-Muslim ones."

Earlier in his address, Dr Mahathir renewed his calls for the international recognition of Palestine as an independent state by putting a stop to Israel's atrocities, as part of an endeavour to end global terrorism.

He said it was obvious that incidents involving acts of terror stemmed from the frustration and anger of the Muslim community, especially Palestinians, over Israel's occupation.

He said he feared that there would be more terror attacks if the international community refused to recognise the reasons behind the violent acts.

"The reason is due to frustrations among the people (Palestinians) over their inability to regain their homeland. They were forced out of their homeland without compensation, their properties seized and taken by Israelis.

"The Europeans and the United States, who back Israel, refuse to discuss the reasons for the acts of terror. If we do not recognise the reasons for these acts, which we describe as acts of terror, the situation will worsen as more people will get angry and frustrated.

"When they are unable to fight a conventional war, this will result in what we call acts of terror."

He said the fact that nothing was done by the world's superpowers to end the oppression by Israel against Palestinians had aggravated the situation.

"From Malaysia, we tried to send building materials to Gaza. Our ships, however, were stopped by Israel in international waters.

This is illegal.

"That is an act of piracy by Israel for which they should have been condemned, but were not. This again increases the frustration and anger of many Muslims, especially Arabs and even Indonesian Muslims.

"And because of that, more acts of terror will be committed in the future, and it won't be confined to the Middle East alone, but all over the world. However, if the rights of the Palestinians are respected and supported, there would be fewer acts of terror."

On the other hand, Dr Mahathir said, Muslims who commit acts of terror were not helping the Palestinian cause.

He said for 70 years, Palestinians had been fighting for their land, but made no progress due to acts of terror that triggered fear in the world community.

To change the narrative used by Western countries on Islamophobia, Dr Mahathir said, Muslims should use diplomatic channels to show that Israelis were the "perpetrators of injustice", instead of launching terror attacks.

"Using diplomacy is a good strategy to win the support of many people. Not all Europeans and Americans are against Islam or Muslims and Palestinians.

"We, however, do things that cause them to lose their sympathy for us. People who have helped Palestinians and supported them have been killed by Muslims.

"This does not endear us (Muslims) to the world at large. We need to get the sympathy and support of the world to stop the oppression against the Muslims by the Israelis."

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TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

