

## **Dr M: Religious Clerics Dividing Muslims**

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** In a scathing post against the ulama (clergy) class, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad accused its members today of disuniting Muslims in Malaysia for worldly and political gains.

The nation's longest-serving prime minister also defended himself against anti-hadith accusations, claiming that Islam and its adherents have become weak from blind faith perpetuated by the clerics.

"In Malaysia, schism also happens when those who are called ulama and are proficient in Arabic isolate themselves and break the unity of Muslims, just because they do not attain a post in the world and not chosen to be a Yang Berhormat," Dr Mahathir wrote in his blog yesterday.

Yang Berhormat is the Malay honorific commonly used to refer to federal and state lawmakers.

"The schism is ongoing up until now. Therefore Muslims have become weak and they have to beg for support from non-Muslims ... There is no neutral ulama who is urging Muslims to unite and be brothers again," he added.

Dr Mahathir also questioned the public's unquestioning acceptance of these ulama and their interpretation of Islam solely due to the group's proficiency in the Arabic language, which is regarded as central to the faith.

"Is it wajib (compulsory) for us to accept whatever is taught by those religious scholars who speak Arabic although it runs counter the Islamic teaching in Quran or hadith?" the veteran statesman asked.

"It is very dangerous and confusing when anybody, just because they are proficient in Arabic and received a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies, can be labelled ulama."

According to Dr Mahathir, the clerics are also to blame for the division among Muslims of different denominations, in addition to starting feuds against non-Muslims that is contrary to Quranic teachings.

"The weakness of Muslims and the insults against Islam is caused by their teachings that cannot be questioned, which begs for unconditional loyalty only for them," he added.

Dr Mahathir's comments came after he was accused of being a deviant and anti-hadith stemming from his support for outspoken scholar Dr Kassim Muhammad, who was similarly labelled.

According to the former prime minister, his critics have rejected and refused to consider his opinions on Islam simply because he is not proficient in Arabic.

Dr Mahathir insisted that one is no less a Muslim even if one does not speak the language, and pointed out that some Arabic-speaking Muslims behaved poorly and caused more harm to their fellow followers of Islam.

He also questioned Muslims who prioritised the hadith over Quranic teachings, and who consequently advocate the violent and cruel punishments prescribed in the hadith.

Hadith — the collection of Prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings — were collected and documented by scholars in the 9th century after they were previously passed down orally for over 200 years.

Islamic scholars have used hadith as basis for the Islamic code of law and an essential complement to the Quran, despite contradictions to Quranic teachings.

Earlier this month, Kassim, a controversial social science and Islamic academic, delivered a lecture at the Perdana Leadership Foundation where Dr Mahathir was patron, during which he lambasted, among others, the Muslim clergy class of imitating the Christian priesthood caste.

His lecture has since been derided by some clerics and members of Islamist party PAS, who subsequently used it to attack rivals Barisan Nasional and Umno as allegedly supporting an anti-hadith movement.

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