

SPEECH BY : Dato' Seri Dr. **Mahathir** bin Mohamad,  
( Prime Minister )

EVENT: The conferment of the King Faisal International prize for service to islam for 1997

VENUE: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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TIME:

Firstly, let me express my sincere appreciation to the Saudi Government and to the Selection Committee in particular, for conferring on me the 1997 King Faisal International Prize for service to Islam.

I am honoured and overwhelmed by this recognition and it is with pride and much humility that I accept this prize. This prize is also a great honour to Malaysia and its people both Muslim and non Muslim without whose tolerance, sensitivity and respect for each other Malaysia would not be what it is today, a multiracial, multi-religious, yet politically stable and economically prosperous country.

But then the bases for these achievements were laid some 900 years ago, when Islam came to Malaysia. Like all today's Muslims our distant ancestors were not Muslims. In the Arabian Peninsula too the idol-worshipping jahilliah became Muslims over 1400 years ago. The other Muslims were blessed with the religion at different periods after that, some through conquests certainly but many more through the exemplary behaviour and achievements of the Muslims who came in contact with them. Even the Muslim conquerors influenced the inversion through their worldly success as much as their preachings on Islam. And so the Spaniards and Europeans, Christians though they were, embraced Islam when Al-Andalus was under Muslim rule.

But the Malays were not conquered or forced in any way. They converted because the Muslim traders from Hadramaut, the first Western people to come to the Malay states were obviously successful people in the worldly sense. They were great shipbuilders, sailors, celestial navigators and traders. They were learned not just in matters of religion but also in medicine, geography and mathematics. As Muslims they were not just devout, performing their prescribed ritual but they were kind and charitable, not arrogant domineering as were the later Westerners in Europe. They were simply good people who reflect the true teachings of Islam, who probably excited the curiosity and admiration of the animistic Malays and their Rajas or rulers. And so these exemplary Muslim traders gained the Rajas who accepted Islam and caused their subjects to embrace it.

Had the first Muslims who landed in Malaysia been ignorant paupers belonging to different sects of Islam, constantly fighting each other and each other's throats; even if they pray and fast the ancestors of today's Malays would have rejected Islam. In the context is very doubtful that today's Muslims succeed in spreading the blessings of the Islamic religion to the Malays if they are not already Muslims.

But Alhamdulillah, the Muslims who came to the Malay states 900 years ago were the equivalent of today's developed and advanced races. They were

~well-educated, skilled, technologically superior and true practitioners of the teachings of Islam not just in matters of religious rituals but in demonstrating that Islam was indeed Ad-deen or a way of life. And so the animistic ancestors of the Malays embraced Islam with such enthusiasm and faith that they destroyed all their old idol and temples. Today, Malays are constitutionally only Malays if they are Muslims.

The progress of the Malays after conversion and presently owe much to Islam as a way of life. There had been lapses of course but by and large Malay civilization and its progress in the arts and the sciences, in the systems of Government, the concept of justice and the rule of law, have been the result of attempts to the teachings of Islamic teachings

I say attempts because there have always been conflict and contradictions in the interpretations of Islamic teachings. Despite the fact that all Malays are Sunni Muslims and followers of Imam Shafie, the interpretations are not always standard of uniform. There is, therefore, a great deal of confusion when we attempt to follow the tenets of Islam.

Still we have managed to remain faithful and committed to Islam to use it to guide us so that in our desire to make material progress we have not forsaken religion or relegated it to the background. Indeed we believe that our material progress is in accord with and in full support of the teachings of Islam, in particular the injunction regarding the brotherhood of Muslim need for us to be strong so may be able to defend ourselves and our faith against those who wish to separate us from our religion and destroy it.

To us political stability, good government, knowledge of all the sciences and technology, material wealth and modern sophistication are all a part of the process of strengthening the Muslims Ummah, so as to defend successfully the faith and our need to 'amal ma'aruf nahi mungkar'. To us rejection of the brotherhood of Muslims, violent feuds between us, the killing of other Muslims in the name of Islam and Allah S.W.T. when in fact the objective is political to us, all these cannot be Islamic. Indeed, we believe that being just to the non-Muslims who are not against us simply reflects the true teachings of Islam. We have always to remember that as much as we do not like Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries to be oppressed, we must not oppress non-Muslim minorities in our midst.

Guided by these Islamic or Islamically acceptable principles, we have found no difficulty in achieving 'hassannah' in this world and Insha-Allah in the next world, in the akhirat.

Many Muslims will of course disagree with us and try to make out that we are 'secular'. We are not going to argue with them because we know that debating with them or opposing them will not convince them that we are right. But we believe and we are equally convinced in our beliefs that what we do is in the service and in accord with Islam. Nothing will convince us that Islam requires us to pass judgement on other Muslims who are our brothers and to act violently to negate Islamic brotherhood, to destroy the unity of the Muslims, to weaken them and to cause them to be dependent on non-Muslims rather than Muslims and in many cases to cause them to be enslaved by the professed enemies of Islam.

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