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KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 28 (BERNAMA) -- PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TONIGHT THAT THE ANNUAL QURAN READING COMPETITION AT INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL IS NOT A WASTE OF MONEY.

HE SAID RATHER, THAT IT BROUGHT THE MUSLIMS CLOSER TO THE QURAN AND DEEPENED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENTS OF THE HOLY BOOK.

ISLAM ITSELF ENCOURAGED ITS FOLLOWERS TO READ THE QURAN DURING THE FASTING MONTH AND SO +WHAT IS WRONG IF WE READ IT IN FRONT OF PEOPLE+. HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR WAS SPEAKING TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL QURAN READING COMPETITION CENTRAL COMMITTEE AFTER INSPECTING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE STAGE FOR THE FIVE-DAY COMPETITION TO BE HELD FROM JUNE 5.

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS SURE OF THE ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF STAGING THE EVENT WHICH IT HAD BEEN DOING SINCE THE COUNTRY ATTAINED INDEPENDENCE, MORE SO WHEN IT WAS GAINING RESPONSE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM COMMUNITY. -- MORE
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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR DISAGREED WITH THE VIEWS OF CERTAIN QUARTERS THAT THE QURAN READING COMPETITION DURING THE FASTING MONTH WOULD ONLY DISRUPT OBSERVANCE OF THE FAST.

THE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE MUSLIMS, SHOULD BE THANKFUL THAT THE EVENT COULD BE HELD ANNUALLY BECAUSE THE COUNTRY WAS PEACEFUL AND FREE OF THREATS OR MISFORTUNE UNLIKE IN WEST ASIA WHERE THE MUSLIMS WERE FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES UNTIL THE NUMBER OF THEIR DEAD WAS MORE THAN THE NUMBER KILLED BY NON-MUSLIMS IN SHABRA AND SHATILA.

HE SAID THAT ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THIS WAS BECAUSE THE MUSLIMS DID NOT READ THE QURAN AND UNDERSTAND ITS CONTENTS.

BANGLADESH, ON THE OTHER HAND, LOST THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN A TYPHOON RECENTLY. HE ADDED

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE, DATUK SERI KAMARUDDIN MAT ISA, SAID THAT SO FAR 23 COUNTRIES INCLUDING MALAYSIA HAD SAID THAT THEY WOULD PARTICIPATE.

EGYPT HAD AGREED TO SEND TWO JUDGES AND SAUDI ARABIA, LIBYA, TURKEY, THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, THAILAND AND INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA, ONE EACH. -- BERNAMA
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