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Mahathir-religion

CLING TO RELIGIOUS VALUES, ADVISES PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept. 14 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed said today he was hopeful that ~~Malaysians would not forget their religion~~ even when the country became more prosperous.

The Prime Minister noted that there was a trend among Malaysians towards greater adherence to religion regardless of their faith.

"This is a good thing. When we talk of Vision 2020, we stress on moral values, not just on per capita income of US\$14,000 per year... this is not good enough for us," he said.

Dr Mahathir was answering questions from the floor in a dialogue with participants after delivering his keynote address at a seminar organised jointly by the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) and the Goethe Institute here.

The four-day seminar on "The Role and Influence of Religions in Society" which began yesterday was attended by about 150 local and foreign scholars.

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Dr Mahathir said well aware of the pitfalls of an affluent society, the government had been stressing the need for the people to cling to their religious values as they acquire more wealth.

Vision 2020 is a national objective to make Malaysia an industrialised country by the year 2020.

In his keynote address, Dr Mahathir said from a cursory review of the realities that had taken place in different societies, the issue at hand was to find out how a nation could produce a people or society that had a deep sense of religious consciousness, committed to ethical and moral values and yet be the most progressive.

"This is indeed very necessary and pertinent because we can easily achieve material progress by physical planning and progress. But the stark truth is that all the material wealth that we have accumulated can be completely wiped out if we do not have the morally right set of values among the people who manage them," he added.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the decay of moral values in the West and also in the former Communist countries which had completely rejected all religions. -- more

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"The relation between members of western society is now largely based on material gains and sensual gratification. Selfishness dominates in the search for these objectives," he said.

The result, he added, was the inevitable breakdown of established institutions such as marriage, family, respect for elders, customs and tradition and in their place, emerged new values that largely rejected all that related to faith.

"The West has not yet gone the way of the Communist but the decay has begun. We cannot foretell the future but there is a good chance that, unless sanity and a return to religion takes place, what has befallen the Communist will also befall them," he said.

The Muslim community suffered from a different malady, he added. Weak and no longer in control of their destiny, they were being manipulated and made the proxies for the conflicts of others.

He said Muslim extremists who pride themselves on their adherence to Islam were, in fact, the bane of Islam and gave the religion a bad image which prevented the world from understanding the true teachings of Islam.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the "meeting of Muslim and Christian minds" at the seminar would not only correct the distorted view each had of the other but also bring back the religion to its proper perspective. -- Bernama

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