

Dr M: Religion vital in ensuring

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By Ahmad A. Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Religion has a definite role to play in today's society and it can act as an anchor that holds physical and material development in perspective, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said religion should never be regarded as simply the rituals which affected people only at the individual level.

In a keynote address at an international seminar on religion and its role in society, Dr Mahathir said: "Religion

which seeks truth to establish justice in all aspects of societal life should be regarded as beneficial to society.

"It is religion which acts as the anchor or underlying principles that govern not only the physical and material well-being but also the spiritual growth and upliftment of man.

"It is religion that steers people towards a more balanced life. It is also religion that provides true guidance and the strongest motivation towards achieving a more fruitful and meaningful life."

The seminar is organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim) and the Goethe Institute Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir said the issue at hand was to find the ways and means of how a nation could produce a people or society that had, as its core, a deep sense of religious consciousness, committed to the highest standard of ethical and moral values and yet was most progressive, industrious, dynamic and dedicated towards advancement and progress.

He said this was neces-

sary and pertinent because one could achieve material progress through physical planning and development, but all the accumulated material wealth could be wiped out if one did not have the right set of moral values.

"We have to be conscious

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of the need for balanced and integrated development in the sense that planning and development should incorporate the need for spiritual upliftment right from the start and not to leave such

a more balanced life

ingredient at the end.

"We have so far ignored this aspect of development, especially during the initial planning stage. If we include this, it is only as an after-thought."

He said that in the past, the country had concentrated almost entirely on physical development, but lately some aspects of human development, mainly in the form of non-spiritual human resources development, were included.

He said human development entailed education, training, the environment and the like, that were nec-

essary to develop all the potentials of the individual in both body and soul.

This aspect of development had not been given sufficient attention, he said.

"It is no surprise, therefore, that we are faced with numerous human problems ... This meeting of the Muslim and Christian minds should serve to correct not only the distorted views each has of the other but also to bring back religion to its proper perspective in the scheme of things."

Dr Mahathir said certain sections of the Muslim community were weak and op-

pressed, suffering all kinds of psychological ailments, with many seeking solace and escape in esoteric religious practices.

In so doing, he said, they interpreted Islam in ways which were unIslamic.

"Because of this, Islam and the Muslims have acquired a bad name. It is regarded as a millstone round the necks of the followers, retarding their development.

"It has become associated with unprincipled practices such as terrorism and injus-

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Extremists 'bane of Islam'

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ices to their co-religionists and the followers of other religions. It has split them into warring factions, causing untold misery and carnage among them."

He said Muslim extremists prided themselves on their adherence to Islam but in fact were the bane of Islam, adding that it was they who gave Islam a bad image and who prevented the world from understanding the true teachings of Islam.

Dr Mahathir said Western society was also witnessing the breakdown of established institutions such as marriage, family, respect for elders as well as respect for conventions, customs and traditions.

He said certain sections of Western society had nothing to hold on to and they were adrift and without direction.